

Leave Out All the Rest

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Leave Out All the Rest

by [Niori](#)

Summary

Odin always intended his charismatic son to be the figurehead king, while the clever one advised him and made sure things ran well behind the scenes.

Only now Thor is king and Loki isn't playing. Thor has been insufferable since the coronation was announced and Loki in no mood to sort out the kingdom only for his brother to take the credit. He's not getting involved until Thor begs him for help.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter One

Loki had accepted the fact that Thor was going to be King a very long time ago. He wouldn't lie to himself and claim that, at times, it didn't burn him. Every time Thor did some idiotic thing that nearly got people killed, it infuriated him that Asgard would prefer this spoiled child on the throne. Most of the time Loki wasn't bothered that Thor was getting the throne. What bothered him was that they had been judged in the eyes of Asgard –in Father's eyes- and Loki had been found wanting.

When the official announcement came –first to the family in private and then to the whole of Asgard- Loki was truly not jealous or angry. Jealous that Thor had their love and angry that, no matter what he did or how he tried, he would never be good enough for them yes, but not about the throne. He would admit to being worried, because Thor was rash, violent and had a tendency to act before he thought. Those traits were perfect for a warrior, but not a king. Loki did however, believe that Thor could be a good king if he was given a wake-up call and a few more centuries. Loki loved his brother, but he was the only one who wasn't blind to his faults because of that love.

Thor was unbearable after the announcement, and no more than one occasion Loki was very close to turning him into the ass he was acting like. But he endured it, because that was all he could do. Loki was prepared to do all that until his father took him aside.

Odin was apparently concerned about how Loki was dealing with being passed over (whether it was concern about his feelings or fear of what he could do if he was upset, Loki wasn't sure). Odin explained his decision with more care than Loki had seen since he was a boy. Thor would be King, but Loki still had a place. He would be an advisor, would help lead his brother along the right path. Odin did see Thor's faults, and knew what problems they could cause, and knew that Loki would be able to temper his brother. Loki, who had patience, diplomatic skills and a silver tongue, would help his brother go from good king to great king.

Throughout his father's speech, Loki nodded his head and kept a look of understanding, complacently and calm on his face. He answered 'Of course Father' when it was expected, and looked grateful when his father clapped him on the shoulder and left. Inside, Loki was seething. It was only years of practice that allowed him to keep his composure. Loki wanted to take a page of Thor's book and destroy something.

His father, in not so many words, admitted that Loki was the son most suited to being King. He had just admitted that, despite the fact, he preferred Thor. Thor was becoming King for the sheer fact that he was Thor, not for any particular qualifications. And where was Loki through all this? He was meant to stand in the background, always in his brother's shadow. He was expected to act from the shadows and let his brother bask in the glory of his accomplishments. Loki had done that his entire life, and now they wanted him to do it in an official capacity. His father wanted him, for all intents and purposes, to take the role of Queen of Asgard.

Loki loved and respected his mother, but no. He refused. He would not.

It was Thor that Asgard had chosen as their king, and it was King Thor that they were going to get.

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Loki did what he did best- he planned. All of Thor's boasting made him itch to completely ruin the ceremony, to let Thor do something stupid that would prove to everyone that he wasn't ready. Loki refrained, because that was not how he wanted it. Loki wanted all to see that Thor was not suited

for all aspects of the role he had been given. Loki was a hundred percent sure that Thor would do something stupid that would lead to trouble for Asgard. Loki was bitter enough that he wanted to watch them both flounder (not fall, never that, because he loved his brother and realm).

So Loki waited and planned. He put with Thor's ego and let the coronation go on as planned. He acted just as was expected of him, including a little bit of mischief. It was playful really (Thor really did look fetching with his hair that shade of green, and really, he was able to hide it under the helmet, so Loki wasn't sure why Thor pouted so), and nothing compared to what he could have done. If he had done nothing, there would have been suspicions, and he couldn't have that.

He cheered and feasted with the rest of Asgard in his brother's honour. When a very drunken Thor grabbed him in a hug and babbled something about brotherhood, he indulged his brother with a pat on the shoulder and helped him to his quarters.

It was the next day that Loki put his plan into motion. The best way to ensure that he was not in anyway involved in the All-Father's plans, was to remove himself altogether. He could not play advisor if he was not in Asgard. If he just disappeared without a trace, it would seem as though he was merely pouting over being passed over for the throne. He also didn't want it to be obvious to Odin that he was leaving solely to spite his plans. So Loki was going to call in a few favours.

He left the palace and headed towards the outskirts of the city. When he reached the home he wanted, Loki knocked on the door and waited politely. When Amora answered and saw him standing there, she cocked an eyebrow.

Loki grinned, "How do you feel about a small trip?"

Loki didn't bother to lie to Amora, because he knew she would do nothing until she knew that he was actually wanted out of her. One of the reasons he and Amora, aside from their magic, got along so well was because they were similar. It would be a lie to say that he was completely honest with her, but he was more honest with her than most. Especially when he wanted something.

Amora was grinning by the end of his explanation, and Loki knew she would be going with him.

"I have been planning to search the libraries of Alfheim for a certain tome. I suppose I would not mind the company."

Loki really could have hugged Amora, but restrained himself. He'd have to do something particularly special for her when the opportunity arose.

"Is there any time in particular that you wish to leave?" Amora asked, the glint still in her eyes, "or shall we leave that up to me?"

"Within the next few days," Loki replied, "but I really should wait until the time is right to announce our trip."

Amora nodded, "I'll make preparations."

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The time came three days later. Thor, Frigga and Loki were all around the family table having breakfast. Odin was in his study. The coronation had happened, but there were still things that needed to be done for the regime change to go over smoothly, and their father was making final preparations before Thor took over his official duties. Those duties would begin that afternoon with a meeting with several lords from the rural areas of Asgard. It was customary, nothing important, and the perfect opportunity for Thor to start his duties.

Frigga was going over what was to be expected in their father's stead. Thor was nodding, though he didn't bother to look excited. That wasn't surprising- the only kingly duty Thor was going to act on with gusto was something that had to do with battle.

"Loki," his mother turned her attention on him, "you've dealt with these lords before, have you not? Perhaps you'd accompany your brother to the meetings?"

Frigga's voice and expression were completely serene, and there was no sign of duplicity coming from her. Had his father not explained the grand plan to him, Loki probably wouldn't have caught onto it. Frigga was manipulating both sons (or perhaps only Thor, given his parents believed him involved in their plans) and was doing so wonderfully. Loki couldn't deny that it stung, knowing that his mother agreed with his father that Loki should run the kingdom but bow down to Thor as King and let him have the glory.

Thor made no objection to Frigga's idea, and that did not surprise him. Thor was so used to having Loki accompany him where he went (Loki could admit to, on occasion, following his brother like a puppy). He had no idea of the expectations of their parents.

It would be easy to do what was expected of him. Manipulating Thor was practically a pastime for him. It was not difficult, and without much difficulty, he truly could have Thor as a puppet king while he truly ruled the realm.

"Yes, I have," Loki replied, taking a sip from his goblet, "many times, but I won't be able to attend. I've promised Amora that I'd travel with her to Alfheim."

There was only a slight widening of Frigga's eyes to show her surprise and alarm, but Loki took another sip and ignored it. Thor made a comment, rather crude given that their mother was present, but Loki ignored it.

"I promised her that I'd help her find a magical text," Loki lied effortlessly, and then finally looked at Frigga, "it was before Father announced the coronation," another lie, this time telling that it was not against his father's plans that he was leaving, before he knew of his importance.

"When do you leave? Surely it can wait?" Frigga's voice betrayed nothing.

"She tells me that she needs it now," was his smooth reply, "and I am curious to see what she's up to. Besides, I'm sure Thor can remind you why it is never a good idea to break a promise to The Enchantress."

Thor winced, and not even his mother's presence could stop the smirk that overtook Loki's expression. Frigga, for her part, mirrored both their reactions. She grimaced a little, remembering Thor's predicament and smiles slightly at the same thing. Thor had, in his (brief and fleeting as it was), promised her many things. Those promises, of course, were broken quickly enough when Thor moved onto his next conquest. Amora was no fool, had known not to believe his words, but that didn't stop her rage. She cursed him so that he couldn't become physically aroused, no matter how much he desired his would-be bed partner. It had taken two months before Thor had finally begged Amora to remove the curse, which she did (personally, Loki would have let him suffer a little longer).

Odin had merely shaken his head and ignored the situation, while both Frigga and Loki agreed that Amora was justified in her punishment (this was shown in varying degrees, with Frigga acting as Disappointed Mother and Loki laughing outright), Frigga for Thor treating a woman in such a manner and Loki because Thor was idiot enough to enrage a sorceress as powerful and vindictive as Amora.

“Yes,” Frigga finally replied, “I do understand.”

“I plan to leave after breakfast,” Loki answered the second part of the original question, “I need only grab my things and seek out Amora,” his mother still didn’t look pleased, so he continued, “Don’t worry Mother, it’s merely a trip to the library. Unlike some people,” Loki looked directly at Thor, “neither Amora nor I enjoy running into lethal situations without a moment’s forethought.”

Thor just laughed his booming laugh, not hearing the obvious disdain in the words, “Come now Brother! I would be remiss in my duties of elder sibling if I were to let you spend all your time in your books! You enjoy our quests!”

Oh, Loki did for the most part. They tended to be, at the very least, interesting. Most of the time he enjoyed them, or at least the mischief he was able to cause while on them. Did he curse the blatantly stupid situation they ended up getting into, usually because of Thor? Yes. Did he resent the fact that Thor had no compunctions about pulling him out of whatever he was doing because Thor dismissed Loki’s interests as unimportant? A thousand times yes. It also frustrated him to no end that he was so generally below his brother’s notice that Thor seemed to believe that all he did was study. If that was all he did, Loki would never have earned the title The God of Mischief, now would he?

“I will accompany you to the Bifrost,” Thor announced, and then went back to eating his meal.

Loki just stared at him, “What? Why?”

“To have your company,” Thor replied, apparently surprised that he even needed to say it, “you will be gone for a fair amount of days, will you not? Surely I don’t need an excuse to spend time with my brother?”

Damn it. Damn him. It was easy to dislike Thor for the way he tended to treat him, until Thor went and said something like this in complete sincerity and completely effortlessly. Then Loki was reminded forcefully that Thor was his dearest friend, the person he loved most in the nine realms. It made him pause about his plan, made him begin to reconsider. He did not wish for Thor to fall, to make a complete fool of himself, at least not after a statement like that.

“You will not have time to miss me,” Loki replied, the sliver of guilt nagging at the back of his mind, “kingly duties, remember?”

Thor made a face at that, “Aye, but there will be nothing exciting there. It would be far better to travel with you to Alfheim, even if it was for some book.”

Here was a reminder that he needed, of why his parents had planned things the way they had. On the surface, Thor made the perfect king. Golden, mighty Thor, who’s words of bravely and battle could inspire even the meekest to take up arms. Thor, who was cheerful and giving, who had more heart than intellect, who would risk his life for a command and take his sword in the name of a just cause.

Those were the traits that kept a realm happy, but they were not those that kept a realm stable. Thor was perfect for the masses, but when it came to the intricacies of governing, not only Asgard itself but also in its relationships to the other eight realms. It required a sharp mind, a silver tongue and the ability to do very unsavoury and potentially unhonourable things for the good of the realm. If Thor was the heart, then Loki was the will and the mind.

Had the two of them combined into one child, it would have been the perfect Odinson.

“You haven’t even begun yet,” Loki was exasperated, “and already bored?”

A bored Thor was nearly as bad as an enraged Thor. Bored Thor itched for a fight and went looking for one, which would in turn result in enraged Thor. As a king, that could very well bring about war or rebellion- people would be much less forgiving of a king who did such things than they would a prince.

An Asgard at war is where Thor would excel, where he would live up to the expectations of them all. But an Asgard at peace? A great warrior like Thor wouldn’t know what to do with himself.

“You are impossible,” Loki said with a roll of his eyes, “truly impossible.”

Thor just grinned cheekily, “You’d have me no other way.”

Loki just sent him a flat look which, as usual, Thor happily ignored.

Nearly two hours later, after kissing his mother on the cheek and having her tell him quietly that she’d explain to Father and to have a good time, Loki had gathered his supplies, and with Thor in tow, set off to Amora’s. Thor chattered happily the entire trip, going on about his grand adventures the last time he was in Alfheim. He had apparently forgotten that Loki had been on that grand adventure as well, and knew what had actually happened (that had little bearing on Thor’s recollection of events). At least he didn’t take sole credit for something Loki did this time.

The closer they came to Amora’s home, the less boisterous and more agitated Thor became. Loki knew that Thor was far from scared of Amora, per say, but he was certainly not comfortable in the presence of the woman he knew (based on experience) could curse him in such ways. Loki assumed it also had to do with the fact that it would only take one false word of Thor’s part for Amora to recast the curse.

They finally reached Amora’s and she came to the door. A brief moment of surprise flickered across her face, probably at seeing Thor at Loki’s side. It was gone almost the moment it appeared.

“Hello Thor,” Amora purred, a wicked grin stretching across her face.

Most men melted at that tone, but Thor barely held back a flinch, “Amora,” was his stiff reply.

It wasn’t often that Thor fidgeted like an embarrassed child, and it was so delightful to watch. It was amusing Amora as well, if the fire dancing in her eyes was any indication.

“Are you ready then?” She turned her attention to Loki.

“Yes.”

“Well then, do be dears and help me carry my things.”

Loki would normally have made a snide remark about how he was not a pack mule, but Amora was doing him a favour, so he refrained. That, and a comment like that would probably get him turned into a pack mule. Without a word he stepped into her home. Thor, on the other hand, hesitated. He could have teased, mocked Thor for being terrified of a woman, but he decided to be nice (also, avoid being cursed himself, as Amora wouldn’t take that taunting lightly for the implications towards her).

“I’m sure Amora and I can manage Brother. Feel free to wait here,” he couldn’t help but add a small dig, “that way you’ll be safe from all the scary magical tools.”

Amora closed the door to Thor's indigent protests, and both of them couldn't help but snicker that, despite his protests, Thor didn't barrel in to prove them wrong. Loki walked through the house without being given directions. He had been here many times before and knew the way to her sleeping chambers.

"Why doesn't your brother like me?" Amora pouted.

"It may have something to do with the two months he was unable to get hard."

"What? That little trick?" Amora scoffed, "That was nearly a century ago. Surely he's still not carrying a grudge over that."

"I'm sad to say he is. Thor is particularly attached to his manhood," noticing Amora's pout was even more pronounced than before, Loki continued, "Don't fret. You can do better."

Amora's pout turned into a self satisfied smile, which always happened when she received a sincere compliment, which this was (Loki was capable of sincerity, despite popular belief. Also despite popular belief, Thor was not the finest catch in Asgard. Amora would be bored to tears after the first month). And really, spending extended time with an unhappy and ego bruised Amora would only be detrimental to his health.

Amora had three bags (why she needed more than one he wasn't completely sure) and they were ones she could very easily carry herself. He didn't mention that, because there were many insults that could be thrown at him, but no one could claim that he wasn't a gentleman.

"Shall we then?" He asked, turning back to her with her belongings in hand.

There was glee evident in her eyes when she answered, "Let's."

Thor was still waiting outside, looking as awkward as they had left him. Loki handed him one of Amora's bags, and he took it without complaint (Thor had also sat through hours worth of Frigga's how-to-treat-a-lady lectures, and some of it had managed to penetrate his thick skull).

This time it was Amora who did all that chatting, and took great pleasure in the discomfort she was causing Thor. She kept the topic on magic, curses in particular, and Loki made sure to add his own comments every once and awhile, because he was enjoying this as much as she was. He was glad Thor came (though, he was sure his elder brother was regretting it), and not just for the entertainment value. A part of Loki – the part that loved and idolized his brother since they were children and that he couldn't seem to completely repress- was truly glad for his presence.

Part of this entire endeavour was because he had been rejected. And here was Thor, walking by his side despite his discomfort, for the simple reason that he wanted to spend time with his brother before he left. It was a simple gesture, one that Thor wouldn't even think was anything special or out of the ordinary, but it meant more to Loki than he would ever admit. Thor might dismiss his talents, strengths and contributions, but, unlike others, he didn't dismiss his person as well.

The walk to the Bifrost was not long, even at the leisurely pace they were going. When they reached the end of the Rainbow Bridge, Heimdall was waiting for them.

"Odinsons," he announced, "Enchantress."

"Heimdall," Loki replied, "Amora and I wish to travel to Alfheim."

"Of course."

Loki turned towards Thor, that sliver of doubt slipping to the forefront of his mind. His brother had no hand in the grievance he was currently feeling, and yet he was the one who would suffer most of all by the actions he was taking. It wasn't Thor's fault that their parents had manipulated things this way, or even that the people of Asgard preferred him, not really. In all honesty, it was Thor who was being offended the most, considering his parents had decided that he was too much an idiot and hothead to rule correctly. Thor was the only person innocent of any scheming, and he was the one who was going to end up looking like the incompetent fool.

The guilt wouldn't let him leave the way things were.

"Elli is old, and dislikes change. Avoid mentioning any policy changes you may be considering, otherwise he will not listen to another word you say. Dagr is young and boastful, don't let him goad you into any competitions of strength. He does not have the training, talent or pain tolerance to back his ego, but his father is overly protective of his only son and heir, and he controls most of the grain resources for all of Asgard. Angering him could cause many problems. If any debates arise, don't bother to try and convince Forseti of anything, because he will only do what his wife says, no matter what argument you might give. All the other Lords should present no problems."

Loki didn't add that there shouldn't be any problems whatsoever. This meeting was something that happened every year, and it followed nearly the same script every time with little variation. Both he and Thor had sat through many of them, and they both knew the proceedings by now. As long as Thor went by memory, there was no reason for problems to arise.

Thor looked at him in amusement as he clapped him on the shoulder, "Do not worry so!" It was obvious that Thor had already dismissed his words, if he had even listened to them in the first place, "Now go, and enjoy your books!" It was not said with contempt or condensation, which was a common reaction of others when Loki's studies were brought up. Thor's tone was one of bemusement, an older brother indulging the unimportant flights of fancy of the younger.

Loki's desire to help his brother extinguished right there. He remembered why he was so willing to do this, to make Thor look like the fool, innocent of plotting or not. He wanted to punish Asgard for choosing an unworthy Thor over him, but he wanted to punish Thor just as much, if for different reasons. He was sick of Thor dismissing him and his talents. Loki knew people, could pick up on the subtleties, strengths and weaknesses, and more importantly, knew how to use and manipulate those things. Thor didn't care, and would never care as long as Loki was there to do it. Loki refused to be undervalued anymore, especially by his brother. Thor would learn to appreciate him right along side Asgard.

"Of course Brother," Loki replied through grit teeth, unwilling to let Thor see the anger and hurt.

With that, Loki turned and made his way into the observatory. Amora, after calling out in her most seductive voice, "Farewell Thor", joined him. She said nothing, despite the fact that there were a few barbs in her mind. Loki's mood was now dark, and Amora was not suicidal.

Heimdall was waiting for them, ready to open the Bifrost. There was suspicion on the Gatekeeper's face, but that was nothing new. Loki just looked Heimdall straight in the eye and spoke, "To Alfheim, if you please."

Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was a delegation waiting for them when the bifrost deposited them in Alfheim. Loki was only somewhat surprised by their presence, and Amora was delighted by it, especially when its leader (one of the younger Elf princes) greeted her with a gallant bow and kiss to the back of the hand. Loki wondered if the prince was a former lover or just another who was hoping to become one. Loki didn't have long to wonder, because one of the Elf princesses stepped forward to greet Loki with a smile.

"Hello Eimmyria," Loki kissed her cheek, surprised and happy that his old friend was here to welcome him.

"This is a surprise," Eimmyria said, "you usually give me more notice for your visits."

"It was a rather sudden decision," that was a lie, but Eimmyria didn't need to know that, "Amora asked for my company," he lowered his voice conspiratorially, "Thor is acting like an ass and I needed to leave before I did something that would upset Mother."

Eimmyria snorted inelegantly, "When is he not an ass?" Loki always found joy in the fact that the Light Elves preferred him to Thor, "But I suppose it would be worse now that he has a throne to sit on. I'm just happy that Father doesn't expect me to be part of the delegation sent to honour Asgard's new king."

"Truly consider yourself lucky," Loki held out his arm, prompting Eimmyria to take it. The prince did the same for Amora, and the group set off towards the palace.

"You'll be staying in the guest wing of the palace," Prince Arian informed them, "unless you have any objections?"

Before Loki could answer, Amora did it for him, "Of course not," Amora would never pass up the lap of luxury. Not that Loki would have objected anyway.

"Two rooms or one?" That was a more personal inquiry. Amora turned to look at him, eyebrow raised. Loki nodded in her direction, leaving the decision up to her.

"Two should suffice," Arian looked quite happy about that.

"The library, of course, is completely open to you. Though we do request that you do not take anything," he glared at Loki, who stared back without a trace of guilt.

It's not like he hadn't returned those books.

"Don't worry," Amora assured him.

Amora would keep that promise right up until it served her better to break it.

"How long do you think you'll be staying with us?" It was Eimmyria who asked.

"Honestly?" Loki answered, and Amora met his eyes with a grin, "I have no idea. However long it takes."

1.1.1.1

A knock on Loki's door made him pause in his reading (a book from Asgard on the trade treaties with the Dark Elves, because damn if he could just stop). The door opened before he could rise from his seat. Amora leaned against the doorframe, looking smug.

"Have a good evening?" He asked.

Amora just grinned as she sauntered in, closing the door behind her, "Of course I did."

Loki didn't doubt it, "And what can I do for you? Are you here to regale me on how you're twisting the dear Prince of Alfheim around your lovely finger?"

Amora snorted, "Hardly. I'm simply wondering about your plans. You do know we can't stay here forever. A trip to the library can only last so long. Besides, the Elves will not put up with us indefinitely. You will have to return soon enough, and most likely before your brother has failed spectacularly."

"I wouldn't say that," Loki's grin was all teeth, "there are a few favours that I can ask repayment for, and even more secrets that people would pay for me to keep. Besides, Eimmyria adores me. I can stay here centuries if I desire it."

"That does not solve the first part of the problem. How is it you plan to justify our stay?"

"By convincing my brother, if he were to inquire, that this was meant to be a romantic trip, and coming here for the book was simply an excuse to leave and give to Mother. Because I do not flaunt my conquests, Thor seems to think I have none. If he thinks I'm here with a lover, he will be overjoyed and certainly leave me to enjoy it. That is, of course, if you agree."

"Agree to be your love or agree to pretend?"

"I had the second in mind, but if you're agreeable to the first, you will not see me complaining."

Amora hummed, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Loki decided that this trip was going to be more exciting than he originally thought.

"And if someone goes and inquires to Heimdall?"

"I've long been able to hide myself from Heimdall's sight," Amora's eyes widened at that, and she was the first to know, "and it won't take too much to hide you as well."

"Truly?" Amora couldn't hide her disbelief, and Loki enjoyed it.

Loki smirked, "Yes. I'll create shades of the two of us that Heimdall will see, and they'll be acting in a manner that will insure he promptly looks away."

"How far you've come," Amora spoke more to herself than him, "so very far from the boy who struggled to form shapes from water."

"I did have excellent teachers."

Amora raised an eyebrow, "I do enjoy a good compliment, but so dislike it when people surpass me."

That was one of the reasons that Loki tended not to show off when around her.

"A bit of jealousy is only to be expected," Loki moved t unruffle feathers, "but surely acting on it can wait until we've both thoroughly enjoyed watching Thor make a fool of himself?"

Amora continued to glare at him, until she wasn't, "You truly are a magnificent bastard, aren't you?"

"I do try."

1.1.1.1.1.1

Thor wasn't exactly sure where he had gone wrong. It could have been when he laughed at Dagar's battle tales and told him that if he truly did wish to bloody himself, he was more than welcome to join him the next time Thor and his friends rode out. Or maybe it was when he jested that perhaps Forseti should trade his seat on the council to his wife, because the times he began a sentence with 'my wife believes' surely meant his wife was the one who belonged here. It might have been when he angrily snapped that he was king now, not Odin, and the realm was his to rule as he pleased. Perhaps it was in the very beginning, when Thor took his seat at the table and announced that this should be kept brief, for he had more important things to see to.

Thor couldn't pinpoint the exact moment things went wrong, only that they had spectacularly so.

Thor watched the last of the lords leave the room, and he had no idea what to do. His anger, which had been so bright only minutes before, when he had been questioned like an inept child, had sizzled out in his bewilderment. When Elli first stormed from the room -in the middle of Thor's argument, his face purple from anger-, Thor had been too shocked to order him back. When three others followed, he had been stunned. When the last two lords had glanced at Thor, and then at each other, and scurried out of the room without so much as a by your leave, Thor could only stare at their retreating figures.

When the doors slipped shut again, leaving Thor alone in the council chambers, his anger returned with a vengeance. It burned through him, red hot and vicious. His hands closed around the table in front of him, and with a yell, he up ended it. Everything -from legal papers to food that had been brought as refreshment- went flying, scattering across the floor and leaving a mess of the royal study. The table landed with a satisfying crash, but it was not enough. Outside, there was a distant rumble of thunder. Too enraged to stay indoors any longer, Thor called Mjolnir to him from its perch near his abandoned chair, and stormed from the room.

He stalked to the training grounds, needing to destroy something. There were a few other warriors using the grounds, but the cowards practically ran when they saw him coming and saw the rage on his face and the brewing storm. Thor growled at their retreating forms, but ignored them after that. Instead, he swung his hammer into the nearest training dummy. There was a great crash, and he hit it again. He kept hitting it until there was nothing left but pieces. Then, he moved onto the next, and did the same. He decimated three before he stepped back, breathing hard. He surveyed the carnage he had caused, and it wasn't enough. It did nothing to soothe his rage of being so disrespected.

How dare they! He was King of Asgard! They had no right to act in such a way, to walk away without his permission! They should have known their place!

Thor threw his hammer at a practice dummy across the yard, and did so with all his might. Lightning cracked across the sky as the hammer hit, and the wood splintered into a thousand small pieces. He recalled Mjolnir to him and prepared to do it again, but a roar stopped him. It was not the roar of thunder, but the roar of his father's voice.

"THOR!"

Thor turned towards the voice, and found Odin stalking towards him, looking every bit as furious as Thor felt. Instinctively, Thor flinched in the face of it. His father's anger was always something frightening to behold. Then, in the wake of it, Thor's anger flared again. He was King of Asgard! He should flinch from no one, not even Odin Allfather!

By the time Odin reached where Thor was standing, the man was raging. Fury was radiating off him, and Thor could only assume that his father had heard about the disastrous meeting.

"What have you done!" Odin yelled when he reached him.

"I?" Thor replied, angry at his father's tone, "What have I done!"

How could Odin not know that the lords were in the wrong here? Thor was king, and they had completely disrespected him! Surely Odin, who had been king for so long, knew what an affront that was!

"Two of the lords have left the capital altogether, another two are preparing to go as we speak! Eli confronted me with his complaints in front of half the court, and gods only knows where Dagar has gone to lick his wounds. If that idiotic boy does something stupid because you slighted him, his father will never let us forget it!"

If anything, that only enraged further. They had not only disrespected him, but completely spit in the face of his position by leaving the capital completely, let alone running to his father and...and tattling on him.

"They dar-" Odin cut off Thor before he could start.

"What did you do Thor! It is a simple meeting, one you have sat through for the past hundred years. How did this happen!"

"Why do you blame me!" Thor yelled right back, "Their overreactions are to blame!"

"Overreactions? Thor, you insulted each and every one of them! If anything, they reacted tamely to how they could have!"

"And what of the insult they gave me! They turned their backs and walked away from me! They just left, and after going to you to complain! That is no way to treat your king!"

"And acting like a spoiled child towards the lords who control the countryside that feeds half the realm is no way for a king to act!"

Thor felt as though he had been slapped. Odin hadn't yelled at him like that for a very long time. It hurt, and he felt like a child...and he hated that he felt it. He was angry, but far from cowed. Despite what Odin thought, Thor wasn't a child to be talked down to by his father.

"You will fix this Thor!"

"I will consent to speak to the country lords again once they are willing to show me the respect I deserve and ask forgiveness for their disrespect," with that, Thor followed the lords' example and stormed away without another word.

1.1.11.1.

Using mirrors to scry, using them to watch others unnoticed, was a skill that Loki learned at a young age. Despite that, it was a skill where Amora was better than him. Amora used her beauty like a weapon, and that preference showed in her magic. The spells that were Amora's strongest (not that her others were lacking) were the ones that touched on attraction, lust and love. It only made sense that a mirror, a symbol of vanity, was a tool Amora could manipulate with more ease than him.

That was why, early the day after their arrival, when Loki needed a way to see events that had happened in Asgard without being noticed, he asked Amora to do it. She preened under the obvious compliment and looked forward to the entertainment her mirror spell would bring. They hadn't been able to watch the meeting between Thor and the lords the day before, so they were going to watch it now. In the aftermath, Loki just stared at the mirror.

"How did he even manage to do this?" Loki was genuinely bewildered, "it's an annual report on the happenings on the outskirts. He could he possibly do it this wrong?"

"It takes a degree of talent to have some of the most docile lords wanting to revolt after one unimportant meeting."

"When I left him, I assumed he'd cause problems with the other realms, not within Asgard itself! And this is only his first day as king!"

"Do calm down darling. Panicking is quite unbecoming on you."

Loki only half heard her, because his mind was still making sense and cataloguing what he had just witnessed. It had gone wrong from the moment Thor had walked into the room and opened his mouth. It only went down hill -quickly down hill- from there. Loki saw all those instances where it went wrong, and knew how he would have turned the tables. He couldn't have fixed it necessarily, but he saw opportunities to soothe egos and make it less dire. All opportunities, most of them obvious, that Thor had missed. Not only missed, but frolicked obliviously by.

"It's as though he heard my warnings before I left, but then decided to ignore me and do the complete opposite."

"Well, at least it seems he listened to you...even if he did turn it all around in that pretty little head of his."

A bark of laughter escaped from Loki, and he knew the whole thing was truly hilarious. Day one, and already Loki could see what a farce this whole situation was. What in the nine realms had Odin been thinking, that this Thor should be on the throne? If he couldn't even handle one simple meeting, how could Odin even contemplate handing over the rule of Asgard over to him? Even if Loki had been willing to play his game, it was impossible for Loki to always be at Thor's side.

"Will he hold to the oath of not seeing them until they grovel?" Amora asked, curious.

"No," Loki waved it away, "for all his faults, Thor is incapable of holding a grudge. He'll meet with them again. Give it a week or two and Thor won't even remember that he should be angry at the supposed offence. He keeps forgiving me, doesn't he?"

Thor's ease at forgiving the sins of others was one of his better traits. Foolish at times, because there were always those who, if you were to forgive and forget, would stab you in the back at the next opportunity, but noble. A king willing to let bygones be bygones was a good thing, kept harmony in the realm. Now, if only Thor could work on not getting so angry in the first place.

"You do have point," Amora conceded, "though, it wouldn't do much good, would it?"

Loki shook his head, "Unless the lords are told by my father to just blindly agree with everything Thor says, no, it won't."

"Dare I ask who Thor needs to act kingly with next?"

Loki sucked in a breath, and felt panic crawling up his spine again, "The Dark Elves. Malekith is sending his ambassador two days from now to pay homage to the new king of Asgard."

The relations between the Dark Elves and Asgard had been, at best, tense and, at worse, openly hostile for hundreds of years. While they had never gone to all out war, they had come close more times than Loki could even remember. There was a very fine, very delicate balance between Asgard and Svartalfheim...one that could very easily be destroyed. If Thor could cause such strife within Asgard, there was no telling what he could do with Svartalfheim involved.

Loki was on his feet and striding towards the door the minute the thought crossed his mind. He would have kept going all the way to the bifrost, if it hadn't been for Amora's magic stopping him before he could leave the room.

Loki made a warning sound, and it was dangerous, "Amora, let me go."

"No," Amora's voice was firm, but there was understanding in it as well, "if you go back now, things will never change. Thor will remain incompetent and you will forever be the puppeteer in the shadows. It will be just as your Father planned, and you'll both be miserable in the end. You deserve better than that. Even Thor deserves better than that."

Loki knew she was right, but he still had to argue. No matter how offended he was, no matter how angry and hurt he was, he couldn't let Asgard fall, "But-"

"Odin will not allow it to get so far as war. He is as manipulative and quick witted as you are. He will stop it from escalating too terribly. Will there be tension? Yes, of course. There always is with the Dark Elves. No matter what Thor does, Malekith is too shrewd to jump into a war he probably can't win. He'll keep the slight in mind to use in the future when he thinks he has an advantage, but it will not be today."

"How can I risk that?"

"How can you not? Your father is a fool for not seeing that his plan is a disaster in the making. He gives neither of you enough credit, and underestimates you on top of it. If you're constantly cleaning up Thor's messes, how will he ever learn not to create them in the first place?"

Loki knew he points were valid - knew she was right- and he was convinced. It didn't feel any less wrong or make him want to rush back any less, but he would not run back to Asgard.

There was a point to this, and it wasn't just about soothing his ego. The point was to make Thor become the king Asgard needed, the king he could be. Loki had to keep sight of that.

Amora's hands came to rest of his shoulders, kneading gently. Loki realized into the rough, letting the tension run from his body. There was a hint of calming magic in the touch, and for once Loki didn't protest the use of magic on him without his permission. He needed it.

"Better?" Amora asked a few minutes later, and Loki nodded, "Good. I expect you and your lovely hands to repay the favour tonight. For now, you're going to go meet your dear friend and have a wonderful, tension free walk around the capital."

"And where will you be while I'm with Eimmyria? With her smitten brother, perhaps?"

Amora laughed, "Nothing quite so exciting. I'll be in the library, searching out my book. Once you're done, feel free to join me. While my studies might not interest you, I'm sure you'll find something to peak your interest."

The libraries of Alfheim always held something to peak his interest, "I like the sound of this plan."

"Of course you do," Amora sounded smug, "I always make good plan."

Loki could think of a few plans that had gone spectacularly wrong, but didn't comment on them. Not at the moment, anyway.

"Well then, shall we?"

Chapter End Notes

A note on Amora's characterization: I know in the comics her main motivation is getting Thor, but I'm going with Tales of Asgard Amora, so he's not the centre of her world. That, and Amora is far too badass to have her entire life goal as catching a man.

Chapter Three

Later, after spending a beautiful morning strolling with Eimmyria, talking about magic, politics and mischief, Loki searched out Amora in the libraries. The libraries of Alfheim even outshone the library in the golden halls of Asgard. Unlike the one in Asgard, it constantly had people within, making use of those books. It was far more relaxing and homey than the one in Asgard, and Loki loved it there.

He found Amora in a secluded corner in the back, sitting on a soft chair and reading the book in her hand intently. There was a pile of books at her feet, and parchment, ink and a quill on her lap. Curious, Loki walked up and peered over her shoulder and looked at the book.

"Influencing dreams?" Loki had been expecting something more interesting, "We came all the way here for something you've long since mastered?"

Loki was disappointed, to say the least.

"Sleeping dreams yes," Amora replied, not bothering to look up from her book, "but I'm not very good at influencing waking dreams, not without falling into patterns of blatant mind control. I want a subtle effect, one that seems completely natural and can't easily be tracked back to me."

An uncomfortable thought prickled through the back of Loki's mind, "This isn't for Thor is it?"

Amora scoffed, "It does not take that much effort to seduce Thor, though it would take a bit more now, given my curse. But honestly, Thor is handsome, but do you know how boring it will be Queen? I only have respect for your mother, but her life is incredibly dull. An eternity of dullness and a distinct lack of fun? There is not a being in the nine realms that is worth that."

Loki breathed a sigh of relief. Amora as Queen would be a nightmare, and as much as he liked Amora, her as a wife was not something he's wish inflicted upon his brother.

"Who then?" Loki was genuinely curious, because who was worth this much effort?

"I've been hearing whispers, tales of a powerful sorceress making herself known. I'm curious, and very intrigued."

"So you plan to seduce her? While I admit you are not easy to refuse, there are those who are just not interested in what you can offer."

"Then I will impress her with my skill, if I can't seduce her. Either way, I want to speak with her."

"Why?" His curiosity wasn't sated, because it was obvious that, who ever this sorceress was, Amora wanted something from her, and wanted it badly.

"She's Jotun," Amora's eyes were glittering in excitement, and Loki's mouth, in a rare moment of shock, fell open, "can you even remember the last time a sorcerer of any repute came out of Jotunheim? After the war, their magic was all but lost to them, let alone to the rest of the Realms. But now, there's one wielding it with enough strength that she's being spoken of in Alfheim and Svartalfheim."

"You want her to teach you," Loki's mind whirled with the possibilities. First, that this was dangerous for Asgard. A powerful sorceress was, in theory, enough of a rallying point for any of the Jontar who wanted their revenge for their defeat. Then, he thought of the possibilities, and the

student and sorcerer in him understood Amora's excitement, and felt it building in himself.

"Can you imagine? Jotun magic, being used by an Aesir enchantress? Or sorcerer prince? If we could learn it, could make it our own, do you know what we could do? No one would ever expect it...we'd be unstoppable."

"Yes," Loki agreed, a bit breathless.

"Between the two of us, this sorceress won't be able to turn us away," Amora finished, "you want this as much as I do."

"Yes," Amora was one of the few he would admit that to without hesitation, "I do."

"Then it seems to me, that you had best stop trying to run back to Asgard every time Thor does something foolish. If you don't let Thor whip himself into shape, you'll never be able to just run away with me and have magical adventures anymore."

"I feel," Loki said after a long pause, "that I just walked into a trap."

Amora grinned slowly, "It's a simple reminder really. It's incredibly noble, how you were so ready to run back and save Asgard from your idiot brother. I, for one, will never question your loyalty again. Yet, for all that, you are still a fundamentally selfish person. You're angry and hurt, and want people to understand your worth, and you want to help Asgard by forcing your brother to grow up. But more than that, you know exactly what your future holds if your father's plan is reality, and you know it is very far from one you can tolerate, let alone enjoy. You've never wanted to be king - never wanted the responsibility- and at the moment, you're to be the king without any of the glory. Everyone cheers for the puppet, not the puppeteer. More than that, you'd be chained to that throne, unable to leave for fear of it falling to pieces the moment you're not there to guide it. You'd be trapped and miserable, and you'd hate it. Not only would you become so very bitter, and I pity Asgard that, and when do you ever do anything you know will make you miserable on purpose?" She paused, "Granted, it does tend to happen as a side effect more often than not, but you don't do it willingly."

Loki was impressed, he had to admit, "You just managed to appeal to every part of me. I'm impressed."

"Not every aspect. I didn't even mention how the trickster in you will be in utter euphoria at getting one over on not only your brother, but the Allfather as well."

Despite the nervousness and edge of panic that still rested in the pit of his stomach, Loki grinned, "Amora my dear, I am so very glad we're friends."

"Of course darling. Now take a seat. We have magic to do."

1.1.1.1.1

Thor had never realized just how many documents a king was supposed to sign in a day. It seemed to him that it was all he did, sitting in his father's study.

Thor had never realized how boring it would be to be king.

Through the first hour, Thor had at least glanced at the documents he was signing. After realizing that none of it, Thor didn't even bother to read any of it, before signing his name.

Finally, Thor grew tired of it all. There was still a large pile of documents on his desk, but surely

they could wait until tomorrow...or perhaps the day after that. There couldn't be anything too important, else he would have been told about it.

He left the study, and went in search of his friends. He had barely seen them, since the coronation feast. He had been too busy, and with Loki gone as well, Thor was in sore need of companionship. It did not take him long to find his friends. They were, as usual, at the training grounds. Fandral and Sif were sparing, though Hogun and Volstagg were nowhere to be seen. It was not a serious sparring match, as far as Thor could tell, for they were laughing and joking as they danced around each other with swords, so Thor didn't feel bad for interrupting.

"My friends!" Thor boomed as he walked towards them. They stopped and turned towards him, both smiling widely and waving their greetings, "I am glad you're keeping yourselves sharp!"

Fandral grinned cheekily, "Aye. How could I deprave our Lady Sif the opportunity to pit herself against the best swordsmen in the nine realms."

Sif snorted, "In your mind perhaps, but certainly not the nine realms."

Thor laughed, and realized that, for the first time in days, he felt happy, "Where are the others?"

"Volstagg is spending the day with his lovely life, Hogun has business of his own to attend to, and your brother is still in Alfheim of course, so it is just the Lady and I today."

Sif smiled at him, "Of course, I could use some real competition."

"You wound me my Lady."

Sif ignored Fandral, and continued, "As long as we are not taking you away from your kingly duties," Sif was teasing, but an uncomfortable knot formed in his stomach, and it showed on his face. Sif looked a little startled, "Are we?"

"No!" Thor protested, "It is only a few documents to sign!"

"Not important ones I hope," Fandral's face was beginning to mirror Sif's expression.

"I don't think so," Thor sounded a bit defensive, and he was feeling it.

"Think?" Sif's eyebrows rose, exasperation in her voice, "Thor, please tell me you were reading the documents you were signing!"

"Yes! Well...in the beginning! But they were all about the same thing!" Well, the first hour's worth had been. He had just assumed the rest of them would be as well.

"And what if some fiend had snuck in his own papers, and you signed it unknowingly?" Fandral didn't sound as exasperated as Sif, but it was close.

"They did not!" Thor protested, "That is something I would have noticed!" At least, Thor thought he would have, "I can promise you, it was only about outposts and supply trains!" There was nothing dangerous or sinister in that.

This was not going how Thor imagined it would. He wanted time with his friends, like they used to be, before he was crowned. He had not counted on...this.

"Outposts? The ones on the borders of Asgard?" Thor nodded at Fandral's question, "And they were about their supplies?"

"Sending them," the memory of what little he had read came together in his mind.

"Thor," Sif looked at him in disbelief, "you cannot just put off signing the orders releasing the supplies to the outposts! Without those supplies, the guardsmen would have nothing. You cannot afford to delay, not with the country lords refusing to bring their crops to the city. You must send supplies before they grow scarce."

Thor felt a blush heat his cheeks, "You heard of that?"

Fandral made an awkward sound in his throat, "The whole realm knows of it. They were not quiet in voicing their displeasures, especially when they were well into their cups."

The anger, which Thor had not thought of in days, flared again. Not only did they disrespect him person, but they spread talk and rumours of him as well? Thor could not less this insult pass!

His friends must have seen the anger growing on his face, because Fandral and Sif exchanged a look, before looking back at Thor.

"Come now my friend," Fandral spoke again, "now is not the time for anger, especially since you still have some papers to assign your name to."

The anger in Thor sizzled out, and he sighed. Apparently he couldn't just put off the rest of his paperwork for a few days.

"Very well my friends. I shall return and finish it," It would take him a few more hours, and all Thor could think was what a waste of hours it was.

"Don't look so gloomy Thor. Tomorrow will be a day full of excitement, will it not?"

That was true, and Thor brightened at the reminder of it. The party of Dark Elves would arrive that night, and there would be a feast to welcome them. The next day would be one of festivities, meant to honour their guests. There would be entertainers, competitions and feasts of strength, which Thor and his friends would all be part of. It was not only to showcase the best Asgard had to offer, but to show the Dark Elves that they were welcomed for peaceful purposes. It was a day of revelry, and Thor looked forward to it.

"Aye my friends. I'll see you are the feast tonight."

Fandral and Sif said their farewells, and Thor returned to his study. When he arrived, he was surprised to find his mother inside.

"Mother?"

Frigga, who was looking through the pile of unmarked documents Thor had left of his desk, turned at the sound of his voice.

"Hello Thor," She smiled at him, but it didn't quite reach his eyes, "I see you have a little more to do here."

"I was merely taking a break." Thor replied, "I needed a chance to stretch my legs."

Frigga's smile was a little bigger, and a bit more real, "I don't blame you. Important or not, it can be incredibly dull, or so your father always told me when he came to bother me in my gardens or weaving room when he needed a break."

The nagging feeling that had entered Thor's stomach while talking to Fandral and Sif abated. Thor hadn't done anything wrong. True, it had not been a quick break he had planned, but the point was the same. Even Odin did it, so Thor was right to do so.

"Here's a small hint, one I've learned from the years listening to your father complain," Frigga said, "the first paragraph will tell you just how important any document is. Fine the most important ones, sign them immediately, and leave the rest for a later time, to be done at your leisure."

That was good advice, and Thor wished he had known it when he had started this morning. He would try it now. Granted, it would still require him to read more than he had been, but it would still cut his work time in half.

"Thank you Mother," he told her gratefully.

"You will have to return to it later of course," Frigga told him, and elaborated at his slightly confused expression, "Have you forgotten that today is the day of petitions?"

Thor had, and he bit back a groan. Once a month, the great hall was opened to all of Asgard, and every citizen had the right to make a petition to the king. Whether it be request, reassurances or to settle a dispute, the king would listen and deliberate on them all. It was a step up from paperwork, but not by much.

Besides a small sigh, Frigga made no more mention of the fact that Thor had obviously forgotten, "Come then. Your father sent me to fetch you. Everyone is waiting."

Thor grimaced. Odin hadn't spoken to him since their argument, and sending Frigga to collect him was further proof that his father was still angry with him. Frigga didn't let him stew in his anger, because she took hold of his arm and walked with him towards the throne room.

"How are you doing Thor?" If anyone else had asked him that, he would have assumed they were questioning him, and it would have made him angry, but in Frigga's caring tone, it made Thor feel loved.

"I am doing fine Mother," he assured her, and he meant it, "though I must admit that being king is not as exciting as I always imagined. I do wish Loki was here."

"Oh? And why is that?"

Thor couldn't help but laugh, "Loki is very talented at turning even the dullest of circumstances into humour. I could have used that these past days."

"Yes," Frigga said after a moment, "you could have," they reached the throne room, and Frigga squeezed his arm, "make us proud," she stepped back then, and the guards opened the door.

There was no great roar of approval as he entered the room, like there had been at his coronation, but there were still cheers as he strode into the room. The crowd gathered was a large one, and he basked in their adoration. He played to them, and they loved it. By the time he reached and sat himself upon the throne, the crowd was far too excited for a simple petitioning.

"Let us begin!" He boomed.

It wasn't easy, paying attention as each petitioner presented their position. Most who came before him were common folk, and their concerns and worries were far removed from those Thor had any understanding of, or any real interest in. Yes, these were his people, and he owed them his attention, insignificant or not. It was his job, as their king, to care for them, and rule them. So Thor

struggled to pay attention, and make his rulings. That part, at least, came easier to him. He heard their arguments, disputes and problems, and he made decisions when asked. He judged on based what was right, and was just and fair to all those involved. The few times when Thor couldn't come up with an answer, he merely told them that he didn't have an answer then, but would think on it and send word to them in a few days.

The people approved. There was no tension here, no angry lords storming out of the room. No one opposed or contradicted him. Thor loved it.

Finally, the crowd had come to an end, with only one person left. Thor didn't visibly sigh in relief, but he felt it. The last man, well dressed but not extravagant like a lord, came before the throne and bowed.

"My king," he said as he straightened, "I am Ran Konurson, and I am the head of the merchant's guild of our fair city. We have concerns, my king. We have heard rumours of discontent in the countryside, and that it will effect the product that comes to us to be sold. It would do us all good if you can give any reassurances possible."

Thor was close to losing his temper at the reminder, but knew this was not the place. It was one thing to lose his temper in the company of the lords he was angry with, his father or his friends, but another to do so in front of all of those who were in the throne room.

"Do not fear," Thor kept his voice jovial, though he didn't feel it, "all will be well."

All would be well, because Thor was the king. It did not matter what the lords wanted or how displeased they were. If Thor ordered them to bring their product, they would have no choice but to obey him.

The man looked relieved, and bowed again, "Thank you my king," he scurried away, and then Thor was done.

Thor rose, and went down the steps. The crowd was dispersing, and Frigga and Odin met him at the bottom. Frigga was smiling, and Odin was not glaring.

"That was well done my son," Thor thought he heard surprise in Odin's voice, but he had to be mistaken.

"Thank you Father," Thor felt proud.

His mother began to say something, but a voice, one Thor did not recognize, called out, "The Lady Gersemi, Ambassador of the Dark Elves of Svartalfheim."

Thor was surprised, and the same look was mirrored on the faces of his parents. He looked over their shoulders, and saw the ambassador as she swept into the throne room. Thor had not expected a woman, though he was not bothered by it. He watched her as she strode in, and he enjoyed what he saw. She was slender, her skin dark and hair fair and long. She was a lovely woman, and Thor wanted her.

Thor stepped out from behind his parents and waited for her.

"Forgive me for arriving early, but I wished to see you acting as a king. The true way to take the measure of a king is not to watch him during war or politics, but to see the way he treats his people."

When she reached him, she gave an elegant bow. It was deep enough to show respect, but not low

enough to mark her as under his authority.

"There is nothing to forgive, for your presence has only improved this assembly," Thor gave her his most charming smile, and when he reached her, he raised her hand to his lips and kissed the back of it.

Women usually melted when he did that, but her face showed no emotion. It was disappointing, but no matter. There were plenty of other ways to impress her.

"I extend congratulations from our king, and thank you for welcoming us," she said, her voice smooth and soft, "we come to honour you of course, but it is also the hope of our king that we may discuss business as well while I'm here. It is my hope that the change in Asgard will usher in a greater change in the relationship between the Golden Realm and Svartalfheim."

Thor already had those meetings planned by his father, for the day after tomorrow, and knew that they were important besides that. Inter realm relations were the real reasons that so many were sending dignitaries to Asgard to honour Thor's kingship. It was a necessity, and Thor knew it. He did not look forward to those meetings, but that didn't mean he didn't know the importance of them.

"Of course!" Thor assured her, flashing her a grin and slinging an arm around her shoulder, "but first we celebrate!"

1.1.1.1.1

The feast was as loud, cheerful and as energetic as always. Though the Dark Elves -all seated in places of honour, with Gersemi at Thor's side- did not participate as much as Thor would have liked (they were a far less cheerful people, not ones to indulge in revelry), they did not seem unhappy or bored, so all was well in Thor's mind. Besides that, he was far too busy trying to woo the lovely Gersemi. So far, she wasn't swayed by his charms. She was polite enough, but that was all. At the moment, she was speaking with his mother.

"Are you enjoying yourself Lady Gersemi?" Thor interrupted whatever she was saying to Frigga.

"Hmm?" Gersemi turned her attention back to him, "I am not having an unpleasant time, but I will admit that I'm curious and would rather watch all around me than participate. It's very different from our realm."

"How so?"

"There are entertainers, both magical and artistic to watch. It is a competition, to see who can bring the most enjoyment. There is dancing as well, after the meal finishes."

"We might not enjoy it as much, but we know dancing well enough in Asgard. Perhaps, I can arrange for dancing to happen...as long as you promise to save me in your first dance."

In the face of his charm, Gersemi's face remained carefully blank, "I would be honoured to have a dance with the King of Asgard," she replied, "but do not change the course of the evening for my sake, There will always be time for that later."

It was most disheartening, Thor had to admit...but he wouldn't be deterred at it, "Then I will see it arranged for after festivities tomorrow," Thor announced, and was rewarded with a hint of a genuine smile.

"I thank you for the consideration. It will be my pleasure to share a dance with you. Perhaps I'll be

fortunate enough to receive from a prince as well? Tell me, where is Loki? I haven't seen him yet, and I have been hoping to find him."

Thor was taken back, "Loki? He is in Alfheim, looking for some book. Why do you want to see him?"

It wasn't that Thor thought Loki unworthy of the company of a woman like Gersemi. It wasn't very often that someone asked for Loki's company rather than Thor's. In fact, Thor couldn't remember it happening.

Gersemi gave him a strange look at the abruptness of the question, "The last time Loki was in Svartalfheim, we had a fascinating conversation about the proprieties of the Slevarm Sregneva spell. I had hoped to finish that conversation while I was here."

The conversation had caught Odin's attention, "When was the last time Loki was in Svartalfheim?"

Thor was just as startled by the revelation as Odin was. Loki had been in Svartalfheim? How? It was not a realm any of the Aesir were just free to visit. Surely, if Loki and his tricks had been in Svartalfheim, they would have heard of it.

"Three years ago. He petitioned our king for the chance to attend our lunar festivities, and our gracious king permitted it," at their flabbergasted expressions, Gersemi's eyebrows rose, "Do not worry about Loki All-Father. For all his mischief, he knows how to behave in a court that has...regrettably less than amicable relations with his own. He is a credit to your house."

An uncomfortable feeling settled in the pit of Thor's stomach, one he didn't recognize at first. He was unnerved when he realized that it was a twinge of jealousy. He was not used to hearing such unadulterated praise given to his brother.

"Of course," Gersemi kept speaking, "it goes without saying, the pride you must feel in your eldest son. Kingship is not an easy thing to shoulder, and the fact you believe your son will continue your legacy, only reflects well on him."

The uncomfortable feeling that had been growing in his chest subsided abruptly now that he was back on familiar ground. Pride replaced it.

"Aye," Thor boasted, "a good reflection indeed," he remembered her original question, "As for Loki, I have no idea when he will be back. He and Amora have gone looking for a magical book," Thor chuckled, "We might not see them again for a century."

"Well, it seems that there is only one Odinson who I can spend these next few days with," It was said politely, not warmly, but Thor took it as hope that Gersemi would come to welcome his advances.

"I swear to make these next few days more than worth Loki's absence," Thor promised, grinning as he once again threw an arm around her shoulders, "I promise you will enjoy yourself my lady."

"Thor!" Odin's voice broke out, and when Thor turned towards his father, Gersemi slid out from under Thor's arm. Odin was glaring at him for a reason Thor didn't know, and he didn't want to deal with it, so he turned back to Gersemi.

"Tell me my lady, how long have you been ambassador? You were not the one who came to us last, though that was a long time ago."

"A mere hundred years ago your majesty. The ambassador before was my uncle. He was killed in a

scrimmage with the Dwarves, and I enjoyed the chance to step into his role. It can be a challenging one, and allows me to travel the realms, which is something I have desired since I was young. It is my true calling, many have said."

"And it is an improvement, for having a woman of such beauty grace any realm is a wonderful occasion," Thor saw the small smile on her face fall away, and it confused him. All women enjoyed having their beauty complimented, so why did she not preen?

"You flatter me," She said, her voice not portraying that she felt flattered.

Thor continued on, "So beautiful in fact, I am surprised there hasn't been someone who has tried to steal you away. It makes sense why you travel with so many guards."

Gersemi fought to keep a composed expression, but Thor didn't notice, "I do not need guards to protect me. I am capable of protecting myself, much like your Lady Sif. There are those who have tried to keep me against my will, and they regretted it. The women of the Dark Elves are deadly when provoked," there was a warning in her voice, but Thor didn't hear it.

"A fierce woman then! I should have known!" Thor was delighted, "Those are my favourite kind!" the last part was said in a lower voice, a more intimate voice.

Both Odin and Frigga were trying to get his attention as unobtrusively as possible, but Thor ignored them. The night was coming to an end. and if Thor was going to extend an invitation to his bed, it would have to be soon.

"Then it is a good thing that Asgard has so many of them."

"That it does," Thor agreed, "but you have me desiring those dangerous Dark Elf women you speak of."

Gersemi's smile was tight, "Then you must come to visit our halls one day. I assure you there would be many women equally curious about the great Thor Odinson, King of Asgard."

Thor leaned towards her, speaking into her ear, "Why wait, when such a beautiful Dark Elf is already in Asgard?" Thor put a hand on her lower thigh and squeezed, "We want to improve the relationship between our realms...what better way to start?"

Before Thor knew what was happening, Gersemi was leaping to her feet, and her palm was connecting with his cheek. Her nails cut into his skin, and Thor reeled back, not so much from pain, but from sheer shock. When he looked back at her, Thor realized it had been a long time since he had seen a woman this enraged. Gersemi was vibrating in her fury, fists clenched at her side and face flushed.

"You will not touch me again Odinson!" She didn't scream it, but she made no effort to stop the rest of the hall from hearing it. Her voice was a cold fury, "And if you try, I swear by the gods above, you will regret it!"

She stormed out of the room then, leaving a stunned crowd behind. The other Dark Elves followed, sending Thor murderous glares. It was obvious that they wanted to react far more violently, but they knew their place was with their ambassador.

Silence remained in their wake, and Thor stopped gapping long enough to realize that everyone in the hall was staring at him, in as much shock as Thor felt. The exceptions were his parents. Frigga had blanched and Odin's face was purple with rage. Before the whispers could start, Odin took control of the situation.

"Out!" He ordered, and when the people were slow to obey, he screamed it, "LEAVE!"

They were not slow to obey him then. All of those in the hall went to get out as Odin rose to his feet. Thor was still in his seat, blood beginning to trickle down his cheek, still trying to process what had just happened. Odin turned to him and gave him such a disappointed look that it made Thor whither, "You are a foolish boy."

Thor felt the words like a slap, and it hurt much more than the physical one Gersemi had given him. He hated it, and he sat there like an embarrassed child. His was just beginning to build when Odin stormed from the hall without another word. Frigga followed her husband without so much as glancing at Thor. Thor remained sitting at the table even after the room had cleared.

He hadn't been slapped like that since he was a teenager, and he was more embarrassed than angry. Did Gersemi truly think him so repulsive as to deserve to be turned down like that? Would it have been so difficult to tell him 'no'? He could have, perhaps, been more delicate in the matter- the hand on the thigh should only been used when it was obvious a woman wanted his advances. He had pushed too hard, and while his ego was bruised and he thought she overreacted, he would send his apologies tomorrow, once her anger had a night to cool.

With a sigh, Thor stood. This was not a good way to begin a diplomatic visit. After this, there wouldn't be room for anymore misunderstandings. He would have to be on his best behaviour until the Dark Elves were gone. He left the hall, planning to go back to his room. He was surprised when he got outside of the hall and his mother was waiting for him. When she looked at him, he felt like a misbehaving child.

"Mother-" He started to explain that he meant no harm and would make it right.

"Do you know what you've done Thor?"

"I offended the ambassador Gersemi by attempting to seduce her. Had I known it was so unwelcome, I would never have done so."

"Offended is not a serious enough term for what has been done," Frigga told him, "the fact that you either didn't care or notice how unwelcome those advances were, only makes it worse. It was obvious, from my point of view, that she was rebuffing you as politely as she could. How could you not notice that Thor?"

Embarrassment burned through him again, "She could have just told me no!"

"And obviously rebuff the King of Asgard in front of his whole court? Surely you understand why an ambassador of a hostile realm wouldn't be quick to do that? Besides, would you have listened?"

Thor was horrified his mother could even ask him that, "Of course! To force a woman is a despicable crime! Had Gersemi asked me to stop, I would have done so immediately!"

He would have been disappointed, but not angry. He would have sulked for a bit, that much he could admit about himself, but there were plenty of other maidens who would melt at his touch. He had been turned down before, never so violently, but he had never once forced the issue.

Frigga's eyes softened minusculely, "It should have been obvious Thor, that she wanted you to stop," Thor felt his cheeks redden, and shame welled in him. Odin's disappointment made him angry, but Frigga's made him feel like a small boy, "How could you even think to try and bed her in the first place? You know how seriously the Dark Elves take their vows."

"She's married?" Thor was surprised, "She gave no sign of it."

Frigga looked at him again, face unreadable. He could tell she was even more disappointed than before, "Nearly a week ago, your father handed you a number of documents pertaining to the upcoming visit of the Dark Elves. He told you it was of the utmost importance for you to read it, preferably enough for you to remember the details. It appears that you did not so much as glance over them," It was true. Odin had handed him those documents and Thor had tossed them on his desk the moment he had returned to his room. He hadn't even looked at them, and had forgotten about them until now. He didn't even know if they were still in his room, "If you had, you would have known that Ambassador Gersemi has been betrothed to King Malekith for a number of years."

With that last sentence, Thor knew how bad his mistake was. Being oblivious in attempting to bed the Dark Elf ambassador was insult enough. Doing so to the betrothed to their king, especially when it would be assumed he did it deliberately (because surely they could never assume Thor would be so dimwitted enough not to know who she was), was enough to declare war.

"Oh."

"Oh indeed."

"I will apologize at once!" Thor planned to anyway, even if the circumstances hadn't been so dire. There was an urgency to it now.

"She's already left."

"I..." Thor had no idea what to do. He had never felt so out of his depth...and it made him angry at himself and miserable.

Without saying anything else, Frigga turned to leave.

Thor hated how lost he sounded when she spoke, "Mother?"

"I'm going to help your father draft a letter of apology. A woman's input will not go amiss."

Frigga didn't mention that Thor should come, that as the one at fault and the King of Asgard, it should be his responsibility. Instead, his mother had already dismissed him and assumed he had nothing of value to offer. It felt as though Thor had been given a test...one that he had failed.

1.1.1.1

Even without the Sight, Heimdall knew that the king and queen would be coming to him. He had Seen what had happened at the feast for the Dark Elves, had opened the bifrost when the enraged ambassador and her retinue had demanded to be returned to Svartalfheim. It was only a matter of time before Odin came to him, demanding he find his second son. When the king and queen entered his observatory in a rush, Odin nearly as enraged as Gersemi had been only a few hours later, and even Frigga was frazzled.

"Find Loki now!" Odin demanded of him.

Heimdall Looked, focusing his Sight in order to find the second prince. He was still on Alfheim, and Amora was still with him. There were together, and when he saw the manner, he turned his Gaze away.

"He is still in Alfheim, and he and the Enchantress are otherwise engaged."

"Otherwise engaged? What does that even mean!" Odin demanded again.

Heimdall had been Asgard's Watcher too long to be phased by anything, "They are in bed together," he told them bluntly.

Whatever answer Odin had been expecting, it wasn't that. He spluttered, at a loss for words. Frigga, for her part, let out a small laugh.

"Ah. It seems I owe Fulla a few coins after all."

Odin whirled to face his wife, "You had beats on whether or not our son was sleeping with the woman!"

Frigga remained unruffled, merely raising an eyebrow, "Well, yes. I thought Loki had more sense than to trust Amora's continued good nature, but I'm sure he knows what he's doing."

Odin just gapped at her, at a loss at how to respond to that. When he recovered enough, he was angry again, "Are you telling me Loki ran off on a lover's holiday while Asgard needed him! He just left Thor to his own devices, to chase Amora's skirt!"

"He went to Alfheim to visit the library with Amora, and it appears they ended up being closer than just traveling companions. There is no crime in that, yet you seem to be accusing Loki of one."

"I told him everything! I told Loki of my plan, but the moment it's time for him to take his place, he runs off!"

"It is not as though he left in the middle of a crisis. He left when there was nothing of too much importance going on. For all that those meeting with the lords was important, it isn't anything that can't be fixed. As for the Dark Elves...while the visit was diplomatic in nature, there would have been little officially done. It would have been playing nice, discussing areas the Elves wanted addressed, and scheduling an official meeting to happen later to negotiate those things. We cannot demand Loki stay in Asgard for the rest of eternity in order to oversee every little thing."

Odin's growing anger subsided in the wake of Frigga's logic, "You're right. He had every reason to believe it was an opportune time to leave, but I need him to come home now. This is out of control, and it needs to be fixed. We can take care of much of it, but this is Loki's future. It's time he steps up to it."

Frigga looked at him for a long moment, before she spoke, "If you were to send word, Loki would come back...but is it necessary at this point? As you said, we can handle this? Thor has made mistakes, but though serious, they are not dire. He has caused tensions with some of our lords, but that is no more than ruffled feathers that a few soothing words will fix. Thor gave the Lady Gersemi a grave insult, and through her all of Svartalfheim. He has a right to call for blood, but Malekith will not go to war he cannot win over an insult, even if it's one to his beloved. It will take more than soothing words, but it can be fixed."

"That is why I want Loki home!" Odin replied, his frustration still obvious, "He and his silver tongue are what will fix this! Especially since I've come to find out he has a better relationship with the Dark Elves than anyone else in Asgard!"

"Can't you see it Odin? He is upset. He may know about our plan, but no others do. Asgard has never been kind to him, and they took you choosing Thor as a reason to be even less so. You've seen how unbearable Thor has been since your announcement. I'm surprised Loki only changed the colour of his hair. Our son's ego has been bruised, and what better way to recover it than being in a realm with many friends and having a beautiful, willing maiden in his bed?" Frigga paused, voice going softer, "I know you thought it best, that he be kept in the shadows, for it would make his job

easier, but that does not mean it didn't hurt him to be dismissed and over shadowed. Just because it was for the best, doesn't mean it was the best for Loki himself. He deserves the respite, and until it is absolutely necessary, we should leave him to it. It will not take too long, and I'm sure when word reaches him about what happened with the Dark Elves, he will return with haste anyway."

Odin stayed silent for a long time, face unreadable. Finally, he turned to Heimdall, "What is happening on Svartalfheim?"

Once again, Heimdall focused his Gaze, "Malekith is raging with the ambassador over your son's behaviour, but has not uttered the word war."

Odin nodded gravely to himself, "If that changes, you will send word immediately," he turned back to Frigga, "I will give Loki a week, and then I will send for him. If anything else happens, I will tell him to return. Until then, I will leave him in peace. It will be good to give the Dark Elves' tempers a chance to cool, and I myself can handle our lords."

Frigga rewarded him with a smile, "Very good my love."

Chapter Four

This time, Loki didn't wait until after the fact to watch what was happening in Asgard. This time, he excused himself early so he could watch events as they unfolded. He missed Gersemi's surprise early arrival, but he watched the entire disastrous feast as it happened. By the end of it, even the unflappable Amora was wincing. Loki was trying to decide if he should be panicking or laughing hysterically. At the moment, he was caught between both.

"I take back my words. Apparently, Thor can do something to make Malekith contemplate declaring war."

Loki couldn't help the semi-hysterical laugh that came out of his mouth. Concerned, Amora turned to him, "You're not going to panic again, are you?"

In response, Loki just kept laughing. Even with all his worries and fears, Loki hadn't expected the Dark Elves' visit to go quite so spectacularly wrong. Thor tried to seduce the betrothed of an enemy king, a woman who was just as fierce as the Lady Sif, and had done it in the worst manner. He had sounded as though he thought the only way to improve relations was for Gersemi to whore herself out to him. Loki knew that Thor had not meant it that way - the man was too good hearted to even think of such a thing-, but it did not matter what Loki knew. What mattered is what Gersemi's ears had heard?

The only reason Asgard and Svartalfheim weren't at war right now was Malekith was too shrewd a king to let anger rule his kingdom. He wouldn't take action until he had made his plans and he thought he had an advantage. It might not be immediate, but Malekith would strike at Asgard because of this insult. This was a mistake that would come back to haunt Thor.

"While I'm not advocating you just step in and clean up your brother's messes, I don't suppose you know a way to make this situation less dire. War is such an unpleasant affair. I have no desire to be caught up in one."

"I could write a letter to Gersemi explaining that my brother is an idiot and simpleton, and hope my insults would please her. Other than that, there's little I can do. I do not think even I would be granted permission to set foot in Svartalfheim now."

"How close are the two of you?" Amora asked out of curiosity.

"As close to friends as a Dark Elf and an Asgardian can be. Given the fact that I'm regrettably related to Thor, that has most likely soured."

"Do you want to return to Asgard? I won't stop you this time," Amora told him, but her voice made it clear that, despite the gravity, she thought he shouldn't.

Loki thought over the question. He was torn. Thor had proven himself utterly incompetent, and was stepping onto a ledge that could destroy Asgard if broken. Leaving that man to continue flounder on his own was inviting disaster. Yet...this would only keep happening, if Loki returned and ratified Thor's mistakes, Thor would continue to blunder through diplomacy, and Loki would continue to fix it. Every time one of Thor's mistakes was consequence free, his arrogance would only grow, and he would think himself infallible. His mistakes would only get worse, and Loki would drive himself to insanity. Asgard wouldn't survive that.

"No," Loki finally decided, "you were right to say Thor would never change if I return. If anything,

this just proves that Thor has to learn how to be king, not just do it for him. He doesn't need to be perfect, but he needs to be better than this...and Thor has to figure that out on his own."

"What are the chances of Thor doing something this terrible in the near future?"

"This week was meant to be centred on the Dark Elves. Nothing else of importance is happening, now that they're gone. Next week, it is the Light Elves' turn to visit. After that, the Vanir. The Dwarves are last, and they aren't coming for another month. There are affairs within Asgard, but that's not what I'm worried about. Thor is too beloved for the populace at large to hold a grudge for any length of time. With the other realms at least, Thor will be on his best behaviour. Even he knows how terrible his mistake was. He'll be cowed, at least for a little while. The Light Elves' visit at least, though it'll probably be wearing off by the time the Vanir come."

"Well, let's be thankful for small favours then. I'd suggest giving the Elves here some warning before they go."

"Some warning," Loki snorted, "I'll be giving them an in-depth report on what stupidity they can expect."

"That's probably a good idea."

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Three days later, Loki sat in Eimmyria's breezy room, having breakfast. Amora was out trying to perfect her new spells on some hapless victim. He and Eimmyria were talking about the wonderful stories a traveling bard had brought to her father's halls, and how she really had to track him down so Loki could hear them himself before he left.

"I would be grateful," Loki said to her, "I do like a good story."

"Of course, it would help if I knew when you're planning to leave," Eimmyria said it in all innocence, and that made Loki pause. One didn't sound that innocent without making an effort to do so.

"I'm not sure," Loki replied casually, "is there a reason you need to know?"

Eimmyria just smiled, "You're not telling me something. Granted, that is not a new state of affairs, but this time I have a feeling you could use my help with it. You've found your book, so it means you'll be leaving us soon...unless you're given another reason to stay. I can, after all, help you with that."

Loki looked at her, and then he laughed. There was a reason he was friends with her, "It seems like I've become rather transparent as of late."

"Not really. I just know you well enough to know you always keep an eye on the happenings in Asgard when you're away. The fact that you didn't return after Svartalfheim's Ambassador left, tells me you did so deliberately."

Loki was silent for a long moment, "I'm interested in how you came to learn about that particular disaster. From what I've seen, my father is making sure that news doesn't trickle out the other realms."

Eimmyria's smile just widened, "Oh, I have little idea where my father hears him news. There are Aesir who travel through Alfheim...perhaps my father heard it from one of them."

Loki made a note to search out Alfheim's spies and send them on their way as soon as he returned to Asgard.

"Of course," Loki conceded, filing it away for later, "and as to your inquiry...yes, there is a reason why I'm here, besides Amora's research. It is...rather unusual," Loki told her most of it, holding back parts he wasn't going to let anyone not of Asgard hear. He trusted Eimmyria with his life, but she was still a member of the royal family of another realm. When he was finished, she was looking completely flabbergasted.

"Did you plan what happened with Svartalfheim?" She finally asked when he fell silent.

"No!" Loki protested in horror, "Thor managed that on his own!"

"That makes the situation even worse," Eimmyria said, distaste in her voice, "what is your father thinking?"

Loki was just relieved that someone else understood and agreed with him.

"How can he not see all the ways that this plan is flawed? Since when are you one who will meekly follow the path someone else decides for you? Your brother may not be the most intelligent, but over time even he would begin to notice that he was a puppet. Does he know either of you?"

That hurt more than Loki wanted to admit. He didn't want to think about that fact, because he had no desire to put himself through those emotions, "I'm left to wonder," Loki replied, "the least he could have done was ask me if I wanted this. I would have said no, but still."

"That might be why he didn't ask," Eimmyria commented, "he must have thought telling you just before the ceremony would insure your cooperation. If you were anyone but you, perhaps that would have kept you there," she said it fondly, if a little ruefully.

Loki just smiled at the compliment (because it was, coming from her) and took another drink of his tea. Eimmyria did the same, silently thinking about what Loki had just told her. Loki let her think for a time before he spoke again.

"Now you know what it is I've been hiding. How do you propose to help me?"

Eimmyria looked back at him, "That is a good question, isn't it? After hearing this, I'm shocked your father hasn't already sent a messenger to retrieve you," Loki was too actually, but he wasn't going to question it too much, "Tell me, is this whole endeavour about spiting your father and brother?"

Loki had to think about that. Not only what his answer was, but now to answer her. His answer was a complicated one, and Eimmyria wasn't devious, not really. Amora may have understood his reasons and agreed completely, but Eimmyria was a royal who was raised to put her realm first. She also wasn't one who agreed with petty vengeance, "I'd be lying if I said a part of it wasn't," he finally told her, "I'm very unhappy with them, and would be very glad indeed for them to feel even half as unhappy as I do. Asgard too, if I must be completely honest. Yet, despite all that, I love them more than I'm currently enraged at them. I want them to learn a lesson. A painful lessons, but I don't want to destroy my realm, or see it destroyed by others."

"What do you want?"

"I want Thor to be a good king without my hand constantly steering him. I want to be able to advise Thor without it being my entire, thankless life. I want people to stop having such blind, enabling

faith in Thor. I want my father to acknowledge what he sees as my admirable traits in public," he paused, and Loki knew that this was the one he wanted most, even if he hated to admit it to himself, "I want my brother to appreciate me."

"Good," Eimmyria said, "because you are my friend, and I want to help you, but if you sought to destabilize our greatest ally, I would not do it."

"I wouldn't ask you to," and Loki wouldn't, no matter how willing he was to manipulate Eimmyria to certain degrees. As one royal to another, he wouldn't ask her to do anything that could go against her realm, "and if things with Svartalfheim grow worse, I will return and do exactly what my father wants me to do. I'll hate every minute of it, but I will do it."

"If it's any consolation, I doubt it will come to that. As to how I can help...I have an idea as to how to extend your stay. We're having a chimera problem in the north. They're already killed a great many livestock and even a few Elves. On top of that, they've brought much destruction, including a handful of villages. The palace mages have finally been able to use their magic to track their lair. Two of my brothers plan to gather a group and strike out in two days and kill them."

"That is fascinating, and I do wish your brothers the best of luck, but what has that to do with me? Surely," Loki said dryly, "you don't think I have a desire to go on a monster hunt. I get enough of that back in Asgard."

"I think that, with your relationship with Svartalfheim on the brink of war, you will need all the allies you can get...and you know that most of us would much rather find a way to remove ourselves from the blood bath, including my father. Yet, what a better way to see we stand willingly behind you than for you to provide aid to us in our time of need?"

"It would be the perfect time to strengthen ties between the realms who'd rather not see us burn," Loki finished her thought, "Father would be less willing to pull me away from that, not with tensions so high with Svartalfheim. He'd only do it as a last resort. Impressive."

Eimmyria smiled, "I may not be as deceptive and manipulative as the great Loki Silvertongue, but I was raised in a palace full on intrigue. Some of it had to stay with me."

Loki tipped his cup to her, "Well then, let's finish our tea so we can go offer my services to your brothers."

1.1.1.1

When Amora sashayed into his room that night, Loki didn't look up from the notes he was looking over, "How is your spell work going?"

Amora gave a frustrated sigh, "Not as well as I'd like. I can manage to start the process, but I can't maintain waking dreams for too long before it turns to mind control. It's becoming...irritating."

"Do I dare ask what happened to your test subject?" He asked, still not looking up. He wasn't too concerned. Amora wouldn't do anything too drastic while she was in a foreign realm.

'He'll be having memory loss for a day or so, but he'll be fine eventually.'

"Have you been using the same person every time?"

"How else was I supposed to measure my progress? Don't worry, I'll be using someone else from now on. I don't want to damage anyone permanently."

"How thoughtful of you," Loki said dryly as he finally focused on where Amora was pacing across the room, "if you want my assistance again, you only need to say the word."

They had worked together when crafting the spell, but Amora had been putting it into practice by herself. He could have insisted to being included, but this was her spell, and he wouldn't risk her wrath by imposing himself. That was the painful road to being cursed.

Amora glared at him, "I can do this myself!" She was proud, vain, and did not like to ask for help. She did not like to admit that she wasn't powerful enough...but she was also willing to do whatever it took to get whatever she wanted, even if there was a sting to her pride, "But if I've not achieved it in another few days, I might ask for your aid."

Loki more than understood how much it would pain her to say that, so he didn't comment on it. Instead, he just inclined his head at her. He looked back at the notes on his desk -documents that had to do with the chimera attacks-, and spoke, "I may not be in a few days, if that is the case."

Amora looked back at him sharply, "Are you returning to Asgard?"

"No. I'm going to hunt some chimeras."

"Whatever for?" Amora looked surprised.

"Eimmyria asked me," Loki grinned, "and it's such a wonderful excuse to keep us here, don't you agree?"

"You told the princess your reasons for being here then?" Amora wasn't accusatory, merely asking a question.

"She figured out I was up to something on her own, and asked me for details. I trust Eimmyria and told her...most of it anyway. Then, she offered such a good way to extend our visit."

Amora raised her eyebrows, "Darling, how is a quest to kill something a good way? If I remember correctly, throwing yourself at large creatures that want to kill you isn't one of your favourite pastimes."

"Well no," Loki replied, "but it's not as though I'll be traveling with Thor or the Warriors. There will be far less idiotically throwing ourselves at creatures that want to kill us on this particular hunt. Planning, skill and accepted magic will go into this one. Plus, Prince Gunnar has promised me first at collecting the pieces of the beast. You know the potions and spells that need chimera parts."

Finally, Amora looked interested, "Chimera parts are hard to get...and for good reason. Those beasts are hard to kill, especially when they're in a pride. How many are going?"

"Ten of us, all of us mages and warriors. The pride is a fairly large one, but it won't be too difficult."

"Chimera venom induces hallucinations. If I was able to extract it, I could work it into my spell casting..." Amora was speaking to herself, and Loki could practically see the thoughts and ideas whirling around in her mind.

Loki hadn't thought of that, but it was a good idea, and if done correctly, could solve the problems Amora was having with her spell, "If you can concentrate it enough, it should be able to help. I'll make sure to save the venom for you."

"Oh, don't bother with that darling. I'll just collect it myself," at his surprised look, she continued

with a roll of her eyes, "of course I'm coming with you. How dreadfully boring would it be to stay here?"

"I have no issue with you coming," Loki replied, still surprised. He didn't, because he had seen, and faced, Amora in a fight. If it wasn't for magic, he'd still have scars from the last time he and Amora had been on opposing sides, "though, as you've previously said, throwing yourself at large creatures that want to kill you isn't one of your favourite pastimes."

"My spell work is stalled, and I need to let my frustrations out. The best way to do that, in my experience, is killing things and love making. If I follow you, I can get both without a fuss. It's better that I take my frustrations out on you and some chimeras, opposed to some poor Elf, wouldn't you agree?"

"Well then, welcome to the hunting party."

Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day after Svartalfheim's ambassador stormed out of Asgard, Thor had decisions to make. He had to decide on whether or not to continue the day's festivities as planned, or to cancel them. Thor was torn- on one hand, if they continued, it would give all of Asgard the appearance that all was well. If they continued in with the celebrations, then the people wouldn't realize how close the Dark Elves were to declaring war. On the other hand, if the Dark Elves were to find out that they continued on with the festivities meant to be in their honour were still being held after they had been dealt such an insult, then it would only enrage them further. He didn't think they could risk them being anymore enraged than they already were.

Had he been able to find them, Thor would have asked his parents for advice. It galled him, knowing that he had to, but he knew more than that that they could afford no more mistakes concerning Svartalfheim. When he couldn't find them, Thor's pride was saved the sting, but he had to decide the best course of action on his own...and he didn't know what it was. Thor didn't like being unsure, but now he was, and he hated it. He eventually made the decision to cancel everything, and he hated that he wasn't confident in his choice.

After that, Thor had to finish the paperwork he left unfinished the day before. He kept his mother's advice in mind this time, and read the first paragraph of each document. He signed the ones he thought needed immediate attention and set the others aside to sign later. Then, Thor thought over the petitions he had delayed deciding on. He made decisions on them all, and had messengers send out his rulings to all involved parties.

It was nearly evening when he finished. He had gone non-stop, because if he stopped, Thor knew his attention would be gone. He wouldn't have done everything he needed to, and he couldn't do that. Thor may have missed or day dreamed himself through nearly all of his lessons on kingship, but even he knew that, if a realm was threatened with a war, then it needed to be as domestically stable as possible.

Finally, Thor left the king's study. He was bored, tired and hungry, and still felt misery at what he had done. He wondered how his parents had done with their efforts to appease Svartalfheim. He would have searched them out and asked, but his mother had told him that he wasn't needed, even if she hadn't said the words directly. More than that, she made him feel like he wasn't wanted.

It hurt his pride, but he didn't know how he could help. He was not good with words, did not know how to appease the offence made. If it had been Asgardians, he would have had no problem...but these were Dark Elves. They were so very different, and he had little experience with them.

Thor wished Loki was here. He would know what to say, especially since he was apparently able to travel to Svartalfheim on a whim. That still surprised Thor, but not as much as it did when he learned it the night before. There was much he had in common with the Dark Elves, as distasteful as the idea was to Thor. It would be helpful at the moment.

He brightened momentarily at the realization that, once Loki heard what had happened, his brother would come rushing back to Asgard. That was just what Loki did.

When he came to the common room in his section of the palace, Thor was delighted to find that his friends were there. They were not as jubilant as they usually were, but for the first time all day,

Thor didn't feel the edge of depression.

"My friends!" He too was less jubilant than normal, but he was still happy.

Fandral and Volstagg smiled at him, and Sif and Hogun did not. Thor took a seat, and then the five of them fell into an awkward silence. Thor was shocked, because he couldn't think of a time that that had ever happened.

Fandral was the first to try and break it, "Well, it was a lovely day, was it not?"

"I would not know. I spent all day in my study."

"Ah...well, tomorrow is supposed to be the same. Perhaps you can enjoy it then."

Thor wanted to reply, but he could feel Sif's glare on him, and it was distracting. He didn't know the reason for it, and that made him nervous. If there was one thing he was actually frightened of, it was Sif's anger turned on him. That was never a pleasant experience.

He turned towards her and started to speak, "Sif-"

Sif cut him off abruptly, "What do I hate Thor?"

The question threw him, "There are many things you hate Sif."

"When I meet someone for the first time, what do I hate?"

Thor knew this, had heard her rant about it enough times, "When those who meet you dismiss all that you have done and only flatter your beauty. When they ignore your accomplishments and assume that you need to be protected. Or worse, that you took this path to find a husband, or that it means you're free with your...affections because of it," it all clicked in Thor's mind, "Ah..."

He understood her anger now, and understood Gersemi's even more. He had done everything Sif hated, and he felt ashamed that he had done it to another woman.

"She was not a simpering maiden Thor," Sif continued passionately, "and you treated her like one! She is every bit as accomplished as I am, be it in a different way. The ambassador deserved more than what you gave her! She deserved respect!"

"You're right! I know you're right! I was no better than the fools who have done the same to you! How do I make it right!"

The last part came out more desperately than Thor intended, and his friends heard it too. They were more than a little shocked by it. Sif had stopped glaring at him, and was instead studying him. She must have decided he was repentant enough, because she was willing to give him advice.

"An apology, to start with. I can tell you what would soothe my ire, though I do not know if they would work on the ambassador. She is a Dark Elf."

Thor didn't care. Anything at all -anything that even had a chance of fixing his mistake- was welcome. He just needed to find a way to make this right.

l.l.l.l.l.

When Loki came to the stables to meet for the hunt, he was surprised to see Amora and Eimmyria in conversation.

"Should I be worried?" He asked when he reached them.

Amora didn't turn to him, but he did see her roll her eyes, "Please Darling. The world doesn't revolve around you," she went right back to her conversation with Eimmyria, who was laughing at him, "What did your mages use to track the chimeras? I've heard they're especially hard to find, even with magic."

"I was not there to witness it," her smile was a bit self deprecating, "my magic is not as strong as I would like," Amora made a genuinely sympathetic sound, "though I believe they used a scrying mirror gifted to my father by the Dwarves. It was forged to amplify magic."

Loki had already heard this explanation, so he wandered away from their conversation. He went over to where the others were strapping on their weapons and preparing to leave. They greeted him, and it was a pleasant feeling, to have people actually want him on this kind of trip.

"Are we almost ready?" He asked.

"We can leave momentarily, as long as you and the Enchantress are ready."

Loki had his daggers on him, as well as his underused sword. A glance over at Amora showed she had a sword of her own at her hip, and most likely half a dozen daggers hidden in her riding outfit. When she noticed that he was looking at her, Amora turned towards him, "Are we leaving?"

"It appears so."

She turned back to Eimmyria, "We really must talk more when I return."

"We have lovely gardens in the private wing of the palace," Eimmyria smiled back, "there is a herb garden that may be of particular interest to you."

"I would be delighted, your highness," with that, Amora made her way over to them.

"I find the idea of the two of you being friends quite terrifying," he commented when she reached him.

Amora just laughed and mounted her horse. The rest of the group, including Loki, followed suit. As they left, he nodded goodbye to Eimmyria, who waved in return.

They moved at a steady pace, and the atmosphere was pleasant. Amora made herself the centre of attention, and that suited everyone. They traveled through the day, and made camp that night. Loki enraptured the group with his storytelling and he unabashedly basked in the approval and appreciation he received, especially when he used magic to amplify his stories.

It was a pattern that continued for two more days, though the storytellers changed and competitions of small magic feats and weapons play were added to the nightly entertainment. Loki, and he assumed the others, enjoyed himself like he never did on his trips with Thor.

They came across the first sign of the chimeras on their fourth day. Eimmyria had told him villages had been destroyed, and they passed through one. It was nearly decimated, though any bodies that may have been there once had been cleared away. Loki surveyed the damage, and estimated the size of the animals they tracked. For the damage to be this severe, they had to be large, bigger than war horses at least. Given that it was a pride of fourteen, it was a bit disconcerting.

They stopped just outside the ruins and discussed their change in strategy now that they had this new information. They threw out ideas for a few hours, and though there were arguments, they

never escalated beyond them. Loki's suggestions were not dismissed out of hand and no one suggested throwing strategy to the wind and rushing in headfirst. It was a lovely change of pace to what he was used to. When they decided on a course of action, they all carried on their way. Loki would shapeshift into a horse and go into the chimeras' territory. The smell of prey would draw them out, and Loki would lead them to where the others laid in wait. It was significantly dangerous and far from foolproof, but it was a plan Loki could work with.

The atmosphere sobered as they passed through the third destroyed village, and this one showed signs loss of life.

"We are close," Prince Gunnar announced, "the chimeras rest in the caves just beyond this village."

"We should stage our ambush here," one of the Elves suggested, "destroyed or not, there are still many places for us to conceal ourselves. It is also open enough for the Prince to run without impediment as a horse."

Loki tipped his head for the consideration, and agreed that this was a good spot. They lead the horses away from the village, and one of the Elves case a spell that would hide their scent and the sight of them from the chimeras. While the others prepared, Loki set aside his weapons and armour. He could shapeshift with cloth clothing on, but anything thicker wouldn't meld with his skin, but would stay in its original form and be ripped to shreds when he became a horse. It would put him at a disadvantage when he switched back to do battle, but he had fought and survived with armour before. It just meant extra caution was needed.

"Be careful," Prince Gunnar told Loki as he prepared to shapeshift, "I do not relish having to inform your family that something unfortunate happed to you."

"I'll do my best to spare you that explanation," Loki assured him.

Amora kissed him for luck, "Don't die. I would miss you terribly."

"I'd hate to inconvenience you that way," Loki said dryly, and then shapeshifted.

He pranced a few steps to reacquaint himself with the body. There were mummers of approval, and Loki preened under it. Once he settled into the body again, Loki took off in the direction of the caves. The closer he got, the more the horse's instincts began to scream at him to turn back. The danger buzzed at the edges of his senses, and he knew the beasts were close. He stomped his hooves and made enough noise to get their attention. Though they lived in prides, chimeras hunted only for themselves and their young. There was no cohesion when they hunted, all of them would over each other to get their prey. They would all come at him at once, and he would be able to lead them all to the slaughter.

It did not take the first one long to come at him. It lunged out of one of the caves, and it took a swipe at him. With a high pitched whinny, Loki dodged the claws, and barely managed to do the same when the serpent tail snapped at him. That came far closer than he liked, and when he heard the others coming to join the fray, Loki knew it was time to run. He used his powerful back legs to kick the chimera back, to put distance between them. The chimera roared, and Loki ran.

He didn't look back, but the vibrating earth told him that they were following. When he reached the village, he kept running. When he heard the sounds of an attack -battle cries from the Elves and Amora, roars from the chimeras-, he began to shift back. He didn't stop running, but instead skidded as he finished his transformation. He ended in a crouch by his weapons, and pivoted to throw a fireball at the chimera that was on his heels. It reared back, screaming in pain. Loki threw his knives, and they caught the creature in the chest. He rolled out of its way as it fell, and jumped

to his feet the instant he was out of reach. He brought his sword around, and it cut into the lion's neck. He did not cut through, but it was a killing blow all the same. Blood sprayed when he pulled it out, and he stabbed it into the tail for good measure.

As his beast fell, Loki looked around. Two others were down, and he was alarmed to see that one of his companions was as well. He couldn't tell whether he was alive or dead from this distance. He threw two of his daggers, powered by magic and strengthened with poison, at the creature that was ready to ravage the body. The daggers hit the goat head, and the chimera forgot about the body.

"Loki! Down!"

Loki followed the direction without hesitation. He hadn't hit the ground when the massive body flew over him. Had he been standing, the chimera would have tackled him. One of its claws raked over his back, and he yelped in pain. It didn't cut deep, but it did leave a burning heat shooting up his back. Despite the pain, Loki saw that it was turning to come at him again, and he rolled behind some debris and threw up a shade. The beast leapt at it, and the image shattered when it passed through it. The chimera went head first into the remains of a building, and Loki felt a pulse of magic take down the rest of it onto the stunned animal.

He sat up, ignoring the stabbing pain, and found Amora's hand waiting to help him up. He grit his teeth and took it, and blinked back bright spots when he was on his feet again.

"Are you alright?" She asked him.

Loki just gave her a sarcastic smile, "Never better."

She ran a hand down his torn back, leaving numbness in its wake. It didn't stop the pain, but it dulled it. It was good enough for now. Without a word, Amora turned away from him, and with a flick of her wrist, sent the chimera charging them crashing into the trees. With a string of words, Loki's magic gave the roots of the trees life, and they tangled themselves around the chimera. It struggled and roared, but it couldn't escape the hold. Wordlessly, Amora crossed the distance between them and killed it with a single sword thrust to the heart.

Loki watched her for half a moment, admiring, before whirling around to take stock of the situation. There was only one chimera left, and Loki saw another of the Elves down. His heart skipped when he realized it was one of Eimmyria's brothers, and that the other one was facing the last chimera. From the sheer size of it, Loki assumed it was the alpha of the pride. It reared up and swiped the prince, knocking the sword from his hand and tearing a slice up his arm while doing it. Eimmyria's brother clutched his arm, and dodged when the chimera struck at him again. He didn't get out of the way of the tail, which sunk its fangs into his shoulder.

Loki cursed loudly, calculating how long it would take for the venom to spread in a man of Gunnar's size. He threw up a shield in front of the Elf, who had fallen to his knees, so when the lion's head went in for the kill, it hit resistance. He rushed towards the prince, and the remainder of the hunting party used the chimera's momentarily confusion to loose arrows, or in Amora's case, daggers, and magic into it. Loki had no idea how many pierced it, only that it was the beast that fell in the end.

Loki dropped the magical shield and then dropped to the prince's side. He clapped his hand over the snake bite, and Gunnar hissed in pain. Loki traced the path of the venom, and found it had already traveled down his arm and started its way into his chest. Drawing it out wouldn't work, not when it would leave brain altering damage in its wake. The only option was to eradicate it completely. He had to burn it away.

"This will hurt," he warned the Elf gravely, and then sent controlled fire down through the wound.

The Elf prince screamed for the whole minute it took Loki to burn away all residue from the venom. Loki was impressed that Gunnar didn't pass out before it was over.

"I could have handled the beast," Gunnar spoke through gasped breaths. Loki rolled his eyes, because this he was used to, "but thank you," that was not something Loki was used to.

"You're welcome. I'd hate to see Eimmyria grieving over a lost sibling," that reminded him of the other prince, "I'll check on your brother."

He found him sitting up, with Amora sitting beside him, keeping him upright. He looked dazed, but otherwise unharmed. When Amora noticed him watching, she spoke.

"He was struck on the head, the poor boy. A concussion, I think. I've dulled the pain for now, until the healer can look him over."

That reminded Loki of the injuries on his back, and how Amora's numbness spell was not long lasting. He would have to be looked after as well, and preferably before the blood loss truly effected him.

Both he and Amora were well versed in the healing magics, as were most of the Elves, but they were not trained healers. They had brought a true one, and Loki looked for her. She was with the other fallen Elf, and she was slowing trying to knit back the innards and stomach of her patient. One of the chimeras had nearly eviscerated him, it seemed. The fact that he was breathing was a good sign, and Loki gave the healer a fifty-fifty chance of saving him. He hoped so, because Loki liked the man. He left her to her work, knowing that any of their injuries could wait.

"Sit down," Amora commanded as she gave the care of the prince to one of the other Elves, "I'll begin haling your wound."

Loki did as he was told without argument. He sat with his back to her, and she pushed away the tattered remains of his shirt.

"It's not too bad," she informed him matter of factly. She pressed a cloth to his back, "It's best that I just stop the bleeding, and not try to heal the wound. I'm not as talented with healing magic," it was obvious that she hated admitting it, "If you wish it, these will leave you with some battle scars. They will certainly impress some maidens."

Loki made a face of disgust, "I am far too vain to leave myself with scars."

Amora snorted with laughter, and Loki felt her magic spreading. He felt the blood stop running down his back and the numbness was back.

"Thank you," he told her.

"As I said- I'd miss you."

He glanced back over his shoulder at her, and found her splattered with gore and blood, with scrapes across her nose, and grinning the whole time.

"Did you enjoy yourself?" He asked, and found himself returning her grin.

"Immensely. We're Asgardian- violence is in our blood. I don't need to do it again for another century or so, but it was such a good time."

He wouldn't admit to it, but he thought so as well.

1.1.1.1.1.1

There were no surprises when the Light Elves came to Asgard. They arrived at the designated time, with the ceremony meant to receive honoured guests. Thor had done all his reading this time, had double checked all the information Odin had given him. There would be no surprises this time, Thor made sure of it.

It was planned out just like the Dark Elves' visit, though the Light Elves would stay for fewer days. All the festivities Thor had cancelled the week before were back on, but he couldn't look forward to them like he had before.

There was no news from Svartalfheim, good or bad. He had given the note Sif helped him write, and had given it to his father and told him to send it with the apology letter Odin and Frigga had drafted. His father had taken it without a word, and only glared at him. Thor had no idea if his father actually did what he asked, and never thought to question him about it. Everyday Thor went to Heimdall's observatory and asked what news from Svartalfheim. Everyday, Heimdall reported no change. Thor wished that Malekith would make up his mind either way, because he hated waiting for someone else to make a decision. A part of Thor viciously hoped the other king would declare war, and then the armies of Asgard could crush them. Thor wanted to punish the man that took power from his hands. He hated being at the mercy of another.

This time, Thor was so conscious of not being over friendly, that he was stiff and awkward. The whole table felt it, and his mother did her best to alleviate it.

"Tell me," she was trying to bring a cheerful mood, and it wasn't working. The Elves kept glancing over at Thor, who sat there nearly silently, in confusion, "have you seen my second son? We've been wondering what it is that's taking so much time."

One of the princes answered Frigga, "Both he and the Lady Amora have offered to join a hunting party. There is a pride of chimera terrorizing our northern territories."

That shocked Thor out of his rigid posture, "Loki? Loki went hunting? Of his own free will?"

Loki never willingly went on a hunt. Thor had to drag a protesting Loki out every time. He couldn't remember a time when Loki went on one of his own free will. A quest for some trinket perhaps, but never a hunt.

"I believe my sister asked him."

Thor was stunned for another moment, and then he laughed, "If you are truly desperate for the help, then let me offer you true warriors of Asgard," he turned from the prince and called down the table to his friends, "My friends, how do you feel about a chimera hunt? The Elves are in need of Asgard's finest warriors."

His friends cried their agreement and excitement at such a quest, and he turned back to the prince. For his part, the Elf looked rather startled, "I do not see the need for it, but who am I to deny assistance offered by the King of Asgard himself? We would be honoured to host your warriors."

Thor beamed. He had finally done something right.

1.1.1.1.1.1

In the few days that the Light Elves stayed, Thor's gloomy and hesitant mood fell away. The more

time that passed, the less he worried about the Dark Elves and what they could do. As time passed, he began to think of Malekith as a coward for not answering the insult to his betroved (though Thor was still far too intelligent to actually say that out loud). He still felt terrible that he had insulted Ambassador Gersemi and was glad he had sent his heartfelt apology, but that guilt was quickly being overtaken by the possibility of glorious battle.

"Let them come!" Thor boasted to the assembled group, "If Malekith dares raise his hand against Asgard, I will put him in his place!"

Thor did not completely want war, but he was not opposed to it either.

The Light Elves did not look all that pleased at Thor's declaration. Their prince was the one who said something, "Forgive me your majesty, but your allies would much prefer the peace of the realms not be broken."

Thor could understand that, even if he did not completely agree with it. Battle was a glorious thing, and a warrior should welcome, not shy away from, it, "Then you may stay out of it, if your father wishes it. Asgard can handle any threat on our own!"

The Asgardians in the group cheered at the proclamation, while the Elves just nodded their heads. Thor didn't care about their disbelief. He didn't need them. With any luck, Malekith would declare war, and Thor could prove it not only to them, but all the realms.

Soon enough, Thor was expressing those sentiments in public, never once considering the possibility that the Dark Elves could have spies in Asgard to hear them. He didn't notice that, outside the warrior class, very few Asgardians acted with the same exuberance to the possibility of a victorious war.

He knew his parents disapproved, but he had taken to ignoring them. He didn't enjoy their disappointment, but he was no longer a child who needed their permission.

The day the Light Elves were set to leave, Thor was in good spirits. He could use a good quest, a chance to get away from the monotony of ruling. Thor was truly excited for something since his second day as king. There wasn't an official ceremony to farewell them, but they had gathered near the stables. When Thor reached them, his friends were already there with the Elves.

"It seems as though everyone is ready to go," he announced cheerfully.

He was greeted, with casualness from his friends and small bows from the Elves. It was the Elf prince Carr who noticed that Thor had clothed himself in his armour and had Mjolnir at his waist.

The other prince looked alarmed at his attire, "Is there something wrong?"

Thor was surprised by the comment, "Of course not. Why would you think there was?"

"You appear dressed for battle. I feared that an attack was coming."

"Surely you do not expect me to take on a pride of chimera un-armoured. Even I see what a foolish idea that would be."

There was a general look of confusion amongst the group besides Thor. The prince was so confused that he did not think before he spoke, "Surely you jest."

Thor was just as confused by the question, "Of course not. I offered you Asgard's finest warriors,

and I am chief amongst them."

"But you're not a warrior, you're the king!"

Thor's anger and affront was quick to come. The words left him furious, "You question my abilities as a warrior!"

"Of course not!" Carr knew he was on dangerous ground and was backtracking, "The realms know of your prowess as a warrior. I'm merely pointing out that you're no longer only a warrior. You're a king who cannot just run off to another realm!"

"Who are you to tell me what to do!"

The Elf prince blanched, "I meant no disrespect your majesty. I misspoke, and for that I apologize. Yet my point stands. This is a simple hunt, not something a foreign king need concern himself with. With all do respect, you have issues in your own kingdom that need your attention."

Thor was infuriated and angry at the Elf's disrespect. He was also surprised by it, "I'm offering to help you!"

"And you are, by allowing your warriors to come with us, and Asgard has already provided us aid. Both its prince and Enchantress volunteered their services."

Thor scoffed openly at that, "You consider Loki's help the best Asgard can offer? Surely then, you're more desperate than you let on. That is why I want to go."

Even his friends, who were s ready to dismiss Loki, winced at that. Had Thor not been so angry, he would have been appalled at what he was saying (and would have punished anyone else who said such things). Loki might not be the warrior he was, might use magic, tricks and cheating, but his brother wasn't useless. He was not the best, but Thor knew he was far from the worst. Loki would, if nothing else, be helpful to the Elves.

Thor wasn't used to being told no, and even less used to anyone considering Loki an acceptable substitute to him. He was nearly unfamiliar with the other that others might prefer Loki to him. Was this a new thing, or had he just been blind to it before?

"You a superb warrior, no one can think otherwise. To fight with you would be an honour, but it is not necessary. Loki is probably the most powerful sorcerer in the realms and his aim is true. More than that, he's more than capable of keeping himself and his companions alive."

This time it wasn't Thor who scoffed, it was Sif, "With tricks. What honour is there in that?"

"What good is honour if you're dead?"

All of the Asgardians just gaped at the prince. It was so fundamentally different than what they had been taught.

"To live honourably is something we should all strive to," he continued, "that is unquestionable. Yet, if it comes down to saving your life and those of your companions or dying with honour, then it is most likely better to live. Honour can be regained, life cannot," they were still staring at him, and Carr was tempted to throw his hands up and be done with this conversation, "I believe I've said enough," he turned to the Warriors Three and Sif, "if you still wish to return to Alfheim with us, we will be leaving shortly," back to Thor, "I thank you once again, for the hospitality that has been offered to us. We are honoured, and my father wishes you a long and peaceful reign, and to assure you Alfheim remains your ally and friend to Asgard. Your Majesty," with that, he turned and

waked away. The other Elves followed.

Thor and his friends just looked at each other, and Volstagg broke it by just chuckling, "Well that was odd. I can see why he and your brother get along."

Thor laughed, "it seems I'll have to prove myself on this hunt," it irritated him that he had to, but it would be a challenge and he would enjoy it nonetheless.

Sif and Fandral side eyed each other, Volstagg made himself busy with his provisions and Hogun avoided eye contact, instead focusing his stare on something over Thor's shoulder. Thor was confused, at least until Fandral began to speak.

"Thor, most of what the Elf said I disagree with, but what he said about you not being able to go on this hunt is true."

Thor wasn't sure if he was angry or hurt, "Why do you all think you can tell a king what he can't and can't do!"

Like always, it was Sif who as the first one brave enough to face off against Thor's wrath, "If you leave, Malekith will surely declare war. More than that, you must be here to command if war is declared. You must lead our people, and too many things could happen if an attack comes and you needed to be called back from Alfheim. A delay such as that could cost us."

For the very first time, Thor completely realized the responsibility that had put on his shoulders. He realized that, by gaining the power of a king, he had signed away his freedom, He was appalled by it.

"So I'm to remain in Asgard forever?" He was angry, though not at the friends he yelled at.

They were taken back by that fury, "There will be other quests Thor," Volstagg tried to pacify him good naturedly, "Once things have settled down, you can go on them. Just not right now."

The tone only made it worse, "I am king! I do what I want!"

Angry, Thor stormed away. He travelled the halls, fuming that he had lost the ability to go when he pleased, and furious that they dared to tell him what to do. Those he came across gave him a wide berth, knowing Thor's temper and not wanting to get caught in it. Eventually, he came to his room.

His father was waiting for him.

Thor was in no mood to deal with his father's anger, which judging by the stormy look on the All Father's face, was what he was going to get. He couldn't dismiss Odin or ignore him outright, but he could end this conversation before it began.

"I don't want to talk about it!" He growled.

Odin, however, ignored him, "You just threw a temper tantrum worthy of a toddler in front of the entire delegation of Elves. We will talk about this!"

Thor didn't know how Odin could have found out so soon. As far as he could remember, there had been no servants in the hall to gossip, and he couldn't see any of the Elves running to tell him. His friends certainly wouldn't. The only way Odin could know...

"You've been spying on me!" Thor yelled when he made the accusation. Probably not using Heimdall, but the ravens could very easily shadow him without being seen.

Odin was unfazed by Thor's yelling, "Asgard's own lords are refusing to feed the capital, the Dark Elves are threatening war because you treated their ambassador like a whore and continue to fan the flames by publicly calling their king a coward. With those failures to your name, there is little reason why I shouldn't be watching you."

His father had never called him a failure before, and that more than he ever expected...because he never expected it to happen. He could have let it stay hurt, but he let it evolve into anger instead.

"You have no right-" Thor started, but Odin cut him off.

"I have every right! I have given you my kingdom, and you seem determined to run it into the ground!" Odin sagged a little like that, like a weight had settled on his shoulders. Thor didn't notice.

"I will not run it into the ground! I will protect Asgard, will lead it into further glory!"

"By inviting a war that will see Asgardian lives thrown away on the weapons of the Dark Elves?"

"You speak as though you've never taken our people to battle before! Were you not once named Odin Spearbreaker by the enemies you destroyed?"

"I waged war to protect innocents, not because of warmongering and arrogance! Do you remember nothing from the lessons of your childhood?" Odin didn't sound angry at that, merely tired.

"Warmongering? You call the desire to remind the Realms of Asgard's strength, warmongering!"

"I would call it nothing else!" Odin seemed too frustrated to say anything else to Thor, and instead spoke to himself, "This has gone on long enough."

Thor didn't know what that meant, so he ignored it, "If you are so concerned about my ruling, then feel free to take of it when I'm gone! If it will end your nagging, all the better!"

"You're a king now Thor! You cannot just run off on a quest to kill monsters! A prince has the freedom to do so, but a king has a kingdom to run!"

"I am king! I'll do what I want!"

"You are nothing but an arrogant boy, not fit for the title!"

"And you are an old man and a fool!" A small part of Thor couldn't believe he was saying this, that he was disrespecting his father so. He continued despite it, "I am your king, and you made me so! Who are you to talk to me in that manner!"

"I am your father!" Odin yelled back, and then seemed to deflate again, "I am a fool, to think you were ready...to think you were worthy."

To Thor, those words had the same effect as his father striking him.

"I never should have given you the crown," Odin wasn't talking to Thor, not really. Instead, he was lamenting to himself, "I should have seen this, and prevented it."

Thor was incredulous, "Shouldn't have given me the crown? Who else? Loki?"

Odin was angry again, "Loki would be twice the king you are! In less than a month, you've nearly plunged our realm into war and food shortages! Loki would never have let this happen! You give him no credit, yet it is him I would hand my throne to!"

Thor was furious, because he did not like being compared to his brother and found to be the lesser. He didn't like being second best, not to a brother who had always trailed behind in his shadow. Thor did not like Loki being better.

"Then you should have given it to him!" It was a childish taunt, but it was one that struck home. It made Odin's fury deflate, even if it was only a little.

"I thought I had, but it seems you're unable to let those plans work."

That only confused Thor. If Odin had given Loki the throne, then Thor wouldn't be king. Thor was king, and Loki was in Alfheim. If Loki were here (and when he came back), he would be a councillor of sorts, but Thor would still be king...

The realization hit Thor suddenly, and it shocked him. For a long time, the truth left Thor speechless. It wasn't until Odin, without another word, turned to leave, that Thor managed to speak.

"I'm a puppet."

Thor was not well versed in politics, but he knew them well enough. With the clues his father had just given him, he was able to piece it together.

"You'd have me be Loki's puppet."

The fundamental truths of Thor's life seemed to shatter at that. He always believed himself to be loved, favoured and a source of pride in his father's eyes. He was a golden prince, and would in turn be a glorious king. His father knew his worth and approved of it.

Clearly, he had been wrong. His father actually thought him an inept child, unable to do anything right. His father saw him as unworthy, and he wasn't favoured at all. His father didn't see him as a son to be proud of, but a tool to be used in whatever way he wished. He was a stupid pawn in his father's eyes.

It would have broken Thor's heart, if his rage hadn't pushed it aside. He was too angry to dwell on his sorrow.

Odin turned back around slowly, and when he turned to face Thor again, there was a mixture of surprise, unhappiness and dread on his face. Thor realized that he had never expected him to find out, let alone figure it out for himself.

"You were to be king in the eyes of the people, who was much beloved and adored. Loki was to rule from the shadows, and keep Asgard running in her glory. You were both meant to be kings," Odin sighed, "but those plans no longer matter."

"Why?" Thor demanded, "because I'm not the idiot you thought I was, and I figured out your plan? Or because Loki was not here to keep me on a leash from the beginning?" Thor wondered if Loki knew, if he had planned this with their father, but that wasn't his focus at the moment. His focus was making Odin tell him the truth.

"Because, even when Loki comes and fixes this, it is too late. Even if you both played your parts, the damage is done."

"Did you really think me so stupid that I would never see the truth? Do you really think me such a fool that I would stay blind for the rest of my reign?" When Odin didn't answer, Thor grew more desperate, "Tell me!"

Thor would have figured it out. It would have taken a long time, but eventually he would have realized he was being manipulated into being a puppet king. The consequences of him finding out after that much time would have been disastrous.

Odin was silent for a long time, and Thor didn't notice how his body shook, "I thought you would enjoy the trappings and pleasures of being king, and that you would not mind giving the duties to Loki to handle."

Thor actually laughed at that, and it was a dark and angry sound. If that was the truth, then Odin wouldn't have kept his plans secret, "Do you know either of us? You use us as pawns, but you know nothing of your sons! If you seem me as unworthy, then you should have let Loki have the throne. It would have served you better, to have the son willing to do your bidding holding the crown!"

Thor was still screaming accusations when Odin's legs buckled and he collapsed to the ground. Thor only stopped screaming when he realized that his father had fallen unconscious. Seeing it, his anger receded. giving way to worry.

"Father?" He questioned, and when Odin didn't answer, it was more panicky the second time, "Father!" When there was still no answer, Thor did the only thing he could think of, "Guards! Guards!"

Chapter End Notes

Because why should Loki be the only one to suffer in the face of an inconvenient Odinsleep? Also, on Odin- he doesn't actually think Thor is all that terrible (or Loki is that perfect for kingship). He's angry, and saying things he doesn't actually mean to be hurtful. Not an excuse, obviously, but he's not being an asshole on purpose.

Also, in the face of The Dark World, my Dark Elves have officially deviated from MCU canon.

Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sight of his father in Odinsleep had always disturbed Thor. It no longer frightened him as it had as a child, but it was a sight he tried to avoid. Now, he had no choice. Odin had fallen unconscious, and there was no one else to give him answers other than Frigga, who refused to leave her husband's side.

Thor was furious that Odin had done this. The most vicious part of him thought it had to be on purpose, that Odin had no idea how to answer for his actions, so he had used the Odinsleep as a way to escape. It was an irrational belief, but Thor was in no mood to be rational.

It was only the shock of the Odinsleep coming on so suddenly and his mother's serene presence that kept Thor's temper in check. It was still raging under the surface, but he kept it in check through sheer force of will. What he had learned was too shameful to let servants of guards overhear it. It was only when they had left and he and Frigga were alone, did Thor speak.

"Did you know?"

She had to, but Thor had to ask anyway. Frigga just looked at him calmly, giving nothing away, "Know what?"

Thor didn't know if she honestly didn't know what he was asking or if she was only playing innocent. It made Thor grind his teeth together and clench his hands, but he still controlled his temper, ""That I'm nothing but a puppet king."

Frigga's face softened and her voice became the one she used to calm Thor when he was a child, "Not a puppet king Thor, merely a king who has an advisor who has more power than most."

It was a pretty way to put it, and if Odin hadn't already bluntly given him the truth, he would have believed it. Instead, it was only proof that she had betrayed him every bit as much as his father had. She thought him just as incapable and unworthy. He was ready to shout at her, to take his anger out on her just as he had Odin, but the words died in his throat. No matter what she had done, he found it impossible to yell at her for it.

"If that were true, then you wouldn't have kept it from me," it left a bad taste in his mouth, accusing his mother of such a thing. It was made worse by the fact the accusation was the truth.

"We thought it best, so you would never think we saw you lacking," Frigga paused, and reached out to squeeze his hand. Angry, Thor shook it off and stood. Frigga didn't show any sign that the brush off perturbed her, "We love you Thor, and we are proud of you."

The urge to break, to destroy, his Thor so suddenly and harshly that it nearly took his breath away. A white hot rage blinded him, and for a moment, he would have given into it.

Frigga was lying. His mother was lying to him.

The white hot rage faded in the wake of tendrils of calm flowing into it. He came down from his anger, his vision clearing again. Frigga's serene magic slipped from his mind, and he looked to her again. It was a simple spell, one used to calm children having a temper tantrum, that most Asgardian mothers knew. Frigga had used it often when he and Loki were young. It had been a

very long time since she had done it. As a child, the spell had made him sulk, but now it only added to the betrayal.

How dare she try and control him, to force him to ignore his well justified rage! Where it was an inconvenience before, he saw it as nothing less than a violation now. He turned to berate her, but again, he couldn't make himself do it.

If anything, the helplessness only made him angrier.

Frigga didn't comment on his almost outburst, but instead spoke, "Your father always has a reason for everything he does. His reasons for this were simple. You will be a good king Thor, if you give yourself a little time. With Loki to help you, you will be the greatest in the Nine Realms."

"It is not advice you'd have Loki give me!" This time, Thor's voice did rise a little, "It is tricks and manipulation so that he could rule through me!"

Thor had always assumed that Loki would be his advisor, and he took joy in that fact. His brother was his dearest friend, the one he trusted at his back above all others. He and Loki would make a fine pair as king and advisor.

That wasn't what they wanted, no matter what Frigga said. They wanted Loki to control Thor, not to be an advisor, but a shadow king. His parents might love him, but they were not proud of him. If they were, they wouldn't have come up with this elaborate plan. They wouldn't have handed Thor a crown, and in the next breath secretly turned to Loki and told him to twist Thor and secretly take power into his own hands.

Had they told them? Had Loki plotted with their parents to make himself the true king? Had he been the one to plant the seed of doubt, to turn Frigga and Odin against him? Had his silver tongue slandered Thor and made his parents see him as unworthy? Had he whispered lies into his father's ears to get power for himself?

"Does Loki know?" Thor demanded, but what he wanted to ask was 'is Loki as guilty as the rest of you?"

Frigga paused a long time as she calculated what answer to give. A lie would only enrage Thor further, but so would telling the whole truth, "Your father only told Loki his plans a few days before your coronation. He knew nothing before then, and was as surprised as you are," Frigga didn't mention that he had handled it much better.

So Loki hadn't planned this, but he was no less guilty. Loki found out their parent's plan, and yet he said nothing. He had chosen to leave Thor in his ignorance...had thought as little of Thor as their parents did. He always called him an oaf, a fool, and was always tricking him. He might not have planned it, but there was no doubt that Loki would love a chance to make Thor his puppet king.

Without warning, Thor turned and began to storm out of the room.

"Thor?" For once Frigga sounded something else other than calm. She sounded surprised.

"You're in charge," he told her bluntly.

"What?" Now she sounded more than surprised, almost panicky, "Where are you going?"

"To find Loki," he growled.

The two injured Elves slowed down the hunting party's return by a number of days. They had stayed a few days at the hunting site, letting their wounds heal and gathering what pieces of chimera they wanted before burning the bodies. It took them an extra day and a half to make the return journey.

They arrived back in the royal city to cheers. It wasn't as rambunctious a crowd as awaited Thor and the Warriors Four (and Loki, technically), but there was still celebration to be had. It was nice, Loki had to admit, to be included in those cheers. He didn't quite preen the way Amora did, but it was close.

When they finally arrived at the stables, there was a group waiting for them. Most were for the healer (who took control marvellously and ordered her aids to get the injured to the healing halls) and the princes (who were given the messages from their father as they were being taken away by the healer). There was one, however, that was waiting there for Loki. It was one of Eimmyria's handmaids, and Loki greeted him warmly.

"Lady Astrid."

She curtsied briefly and then spoke, "Prince Loki, my lady princess asked me to bring you to her."

Loki was curious as to why, "Of course my lady. Give me a moment."

He turned to the comrades who had not been taken to the healing halls, "My friends, it has been a good time. I've enjoyed myself immensely," it wasn't even a lie.

"Aye Silvertongue, and thank you for your aid. There will be a feast to celebrate, will you be there?"

Feasts weren't Loki's favourite way to celebrate, but he would be there nevertheless. It would be rude not to go, and besides that, he was looking forward to having his accomplishments praised, "I'll be there."

They were all glad of it, and he clasped arms with them all. Before he followed the lady, he turned to Amora. The Enchantress spoke first.

"I'll take our spoils to your room. When you return, we'll start our spell work," it was as close as Amora would come to asking for his help.

"I look forward to it," he told her, and then looked back to Lady Astrid, "lead the way."

She curtsied again, and Loki followed her from the stables. She took him to the meeting hall, where the members of the royal family had private audiences. He entered. and stopped in surprise. Out of all the things Loki expected to see, none of them was the Warriors Three and Lady Sif standing there and chatting with the royal family of Alfheim.

Fandral was the first one to notice him, "Loki!" he cried out with a smile, "How long it has been! We began to think you had run away to Alfheim and planned not to leave. I would understand of course, since the realm has such lovely ladies," he threw a flirtatious smile to the lady at Loki's side, who blushed a deep red and looked away shyly.

Loki didn't bother to hide his eye roll, "Thank you for the escort my lady, but I'd leave if I were you, before that scoundrel gets his hands on you."

The girl blushed again and ran off, throwing another shy look at Fandral over her shoulder.

"My friend, you wound me! I have only the best intentions at heart."

Loki scoffed, and Fandral gave him a look of false hurt.

Out of them all, it was Fandral that Loki liked best. He was the one who truly treated Loki as a good friend (the others went from friendly to grudging acceptance, depending on the day), and the only one who's teasing was all in good fun, not meant to be taunting. When the others, even Thor and the other warriors, grew to sharp in their jests, he was the one to call them on it. When it came to a battle of wits and words, Fandral gave as good as he got, a trait Loki respected in anyone.

"What is it you're doing here? Has my brother summoned me back to Asgard?" Loki hoped not, because he would have no choice but to return. If the king of Asgard gave him a direct order, he had to obey.

"No," Sif answered, "though I'm surprised you haven't returned," Sif couldn't ask directly if he knew what had been happening on Asgard, not with Alfheim's royal family there, but this was her covert way of asking him.

"I've had no reason to," he replied, answering her with a lie. Words of his own weren't spoken, and he knew she heard his answer as 'what's happening that I should be there for?'.

"You've been missed," which translated to 'your help is needed'.

He nodded, acknowledging that he understood her. She nodded in return.

He and Sif had never been true friends. They had too much history -children who fought to be the one Thor loved most, and acted as children do- between them for that, even if the resentments of childhood were long gone. They might not be true friends, but they respected each other. Loki respected her for all her accomplishments, and Sif respected him for his power and intelligence, even if she disapproved of his methods. If there was one person he wanted at his back during a fight, it was Sif.

"We've come to join the chimera hunt that Prince Carr told us about," Volstagg exclaimed loudly and jubilantly, as always, "We have come to offer our aid, compliments of Asgard and her king."

Loki wasn't surprised, though it irritated him. Of course they would hear of it, and they would come to the rescue. They would be Asgard's aid, as though Loki couldn't do that himself. As if he couldn't represent Asgard proudly. Of course Thor would dismiss him as unimportant, as unable to handle the hunt.

It left a sour taste in his mouth, and Loki had to take a few calming breathes before he could speak, "Then I'm afraid I must disappoint you, since we're returning just now."

"Oh," Volstagg sighed in disappointment, "I had hoped to give a claw to my eldest for her name day," he puffed up in pride, and Loki couldn't help but find it a tiny bit endearing, "She has quite the collection of trinkets from beasts from across the realms."

Fandral clapped Volstagg on the back, "Fear not my friend. It might not be as exciting as a claw, but Loki can give him a thrilling story."

"That I will be glad to do," Loki meant it, "illusions too, if your dear wife deems them appropriate. It will not be as exciting as a story starring her father, but I will do my best to please her," Loki paused, "I do, perhaps, have a spare claw she can have," Amora would probably kill him, but he was sure there was something he could give her in return.

Volstagg beamed, "Thank you! You will certainly be my daughter's favourite person for this."

Loki would never admit it, but he adored Volstagg's brood of children. The little ones appreciated him in ways that most didn't. They loved his magic and his tricks, and always begged him to show them more. He was surprised at first that Volstagg didn't discourage it, until he realized the warrior cared little for the expectations of others in the face of his children's happiness. He was a better father than Odin could ever hope to be, and Loki appreciated it. It helped that it was the one thing Volstagg never teased him in public about, and Loki was thankful for that- his reputation would never recover. In exchange, Loki watched the children when Volstagg and his wife wished to have a day to themselves. It was a trade Loki was more than willing to make.

Sif looked as disappointed as Volstagg did, though for different reasons, "All dead?" It was a missed chance for glory, and Sif hated that.

"All dead," Loki confirmed, a little offended that they thought they would return without finishing the job. What kind of hunter would just let some of their prey keep wandering around? Did they think that he and the Elves were that incompetent?

Sif's face darkened somewhat, and it was obvious the woman hadn't expected that. They were a week late, and not the only useful warriors in the realms, despite what their egos might think. She said nothing after that.

"Oh well," Fandral, as always, took it with the most cheer, "that's the way of it I suppose. We should have expected it really, with how long they left before we arrived."

Yes, Loki thought snidely, you should have.

"There will be other hunts," Hogun finally spoke, and said it simply.

Loki couldn't read the man, and it irritated him. Very rarely did Hogun give Loki a way to figure out what he was thinking, and it was a blind spot. Loki didn't like blind spots. It wasn't that he didn't like the man -he had no problem with him, and quite enjoyed the silence-, he just didn't like the inability to understand him.

"It's true," Volstagg replied, "though a trip was wasted."

Loki barely suppressed a wince. One did not go into another realm, stand in front of its ruler and proclaim coming to their realm was a waste of time. He shot a look at the king, and he looked very unimpressed at the statement. Blessedly, Loki wasn't the only one who noticed when something incredibly stupid was said. Fandral noticed too.

"Never a wasted trip, when we get to see the beauty of Alfheim once again. It is always good to be in the company of the Light Elves."

"And here," Loki added dryly, adding to Fandral's statement, "I thought seeing me after so many days would be reason enough to make the trip."

With the exception of Hogun, they all chuckled at that.

"Fair enough," Fandral laughed.

"Perhaps," Eimmyria's voice interrupted their conversation, "there is another way to improve your visit. There will be a feast tonight to celebrate those who killed the chimeras. Surely you would enjoy attending?"

Their noises of approval were loud and cheerful. Loki's enthusiasm dimmed a little, but it wasn't a complete loss. It could be worse, because Thor could be with them.

"Can you spare a few more days?" It was the king who spoke this time, "I know many of my warriors would enjoy the chance to face off against the Warriors Three and the Lady Sif. Not a tournament, but a few sparring matches. Your prince has already indulged."

Loki had sparred with some of the troops during his time on Alfheim, and if there was one thing to spur them into action, it was being told that Loki had done something warrior-like well. Loki didn't know the king's game, but he appreciated it. When they left, he would have to go with them. They would take the time to tell him everything that happened in Asgard, and expect him to return home with them. If he didn't, his real plan would be found out, and he couldn't have that.

"I'll only take a few more days," Loki said innocently, "it would be easier for us all to leave together," he had no idea if Amora would want to leave in that time, but he'd worry about that later.

He had a few days to rework his plan. Loki could work with that.

It was Loki's statement that made them give their final agreement. After that, a few more meaningless pleasantries were exchanged, before Loki and Eimmyria took the warriors to the chambers they would be staying in. They chatted, and Loki was less irritated with their unexpected visit than he would have expected.

He left them a short time later, and Eimmyria after he promised to remind Amora of the invitation to see the herb garden. He was in no rush to return to his room, though the excitement of finding a way to use the chimera venom to Amora's waking dream spell was beginning to build.

For the second time, Loki was surprised by what greeted him. He expected Amora to be gleefully going through their parts, but instead he found her looking at the scrying mirror with a look of near panic.

He couldn't remember the last time he saw Amora panicked. It didn't bode well. When she saw him, Amora wasted no time in pulling Loki to the mirror.

"I decided to glance at what happened while we were gone. You need to see this."

She began at the point where Thor invited the warriors on the hunt, even though Prince Carr assured them it wasn't necessary. Loki's hands clenched together as he listened to Thor all but declare him worthless, not only once, but twice. Not even Prince Carr's defence of him had stopped the anger boiling in him. That arrogant bastard.

He didn't have time to be furious, because within a moment, the truth unravelled. It didn't take long for Loki's rage to go from Thor to Odin. He watched as Thor found out the truth, and his anger (still there, as Thor persisted in insulting him) changed to pity. He pitied Thor as he watched his brother's life fall down around him. It wasn't fair, for all Thor's faults, and Thor didn't deserve to be Odin's pawn anymore than Loki did. He shouldn't have had to find out that way, and have to listen to their father's half excuses...

When he fell into Odinsleep, Loki began cursing loudly in every language he knew. That couldn't be an accident, not with that timing! How dare he leave Thor like that, and Frigga to clean up his mess. Loki's magic flew out without warning, shattering the table next to the mirror. He was angry at Thor, Odin and Frigga for being just as unsuccessful as Odin at explaining. They did nothing to calm Thor's rage, and Frigga's spell did nothing but make Thor angrier, even if he couldn't act on it.

He finally understood Amora's panic when he saw Thor storm away from his mother with a growl of going to find Loki. He was the only one for Thor to take his anger out on -almost berserker level, had Frigga not stopped it-, and he was going to. Whether or not it was true, Thor would take it out on Loki, and he would not be gentle about it.

He cursed again, ending the spell with a wave of his hand. This was not going the way he wanted it to go.

"Go," he told Amora, "Leave. You do not need to be part of this."

"He's furious Loki!" She protested, "He's going to harm you!"

"He won't hurt me...at least not permanently," that didn't give Amora any comfort at all, "it will only be worse if he finds you here."

Amora scowled, but accepted it, "Fine, but I'll be watching from my room. If it's getting out of control, I will intervene."

Loki was still convinced that it would only make it worse, but he didn't try to dissuade Amora. She would do what she wanted, no matter what Loki said. Without waiting for him agreement, Amora took the scrying mirror and left.

All Loki could do was wait. He couldn't pinpoint the feelings swirling in him, because there were too many to name. Pity, anger, fear, betrayal, glee, love, hate...he felt them all. He didn't have to wait long. The air changed only a moment before the first boom of thunder echoed through the air. Lighting flashed, coming down in jagged bolts that Loki could see out his window. The storm started in earnest then.

Loki wondered what the others thought. He wondered what they decided had brought the Thunderer's wrath to their realm. He wondered if they were frightened, or merely annoyed at the interruption to their day.

The storm grew closer and the air grew heavy with barely constrained power, all of it tasted of pure, unadulterated rage. It was glorious and frightening, and so very much Thor.

Finally, there was a pounding on his door, and a roar, "LOKI!"

Loki pitied whatever Elf had been the unfortunate soul that Thor had stopped to ask directions to the room. This was going to end badly, of that much Loki was sure. He should have run, gotten away until Thor had cooled down. He should have, but instead he squared his shoulders, pushed down all emotions and left his face carefully blank. Then he opened the door.

"Hello Thor. How may I help you?"

Chapter End Notes

First up, apologies are in order- I had meant to get this part to you before Christmas (hope everyone had a great one!), but my power went out for a week. That said, I can wish you happy new year right on time!

Like Odin, Frigga once again fails at comforting the child who's having an identity crisis (is it just me, or should these two take some parenting classes?). Also, I wanted

to go over just what Loki's relationship to the Warriors 4 was like, because while I think they were never really real friends, per say, they didn't hate each other completely either.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Loki should have anticipated the punch in order to avoid it. He didn't, though he was quick enough to turn away to avoid the worst of it. Thor's fist clipped him in the jaw and made him stumble back, but nothing broke. Thor came at him again, and this time Loki knew enough to dodge. He twisted out of Thor's grasp when his grip came up empty.

Loki had to defuse this situation if he had any chance of getting out of it uninjured.

"Thor! You need to stop!"

Thor didn't listen, and Loki wasn't surprised. He had known that it was a long shot when he tried it. Thor tried to hit him again, and smashed a large hole in the dresser instead.

If Loki didn't get this under control, then Thor would utterly destroy the room. He didn't need Alfheim to know that the King of Asgard was a child prone to temper tantrums. Loki whirled behind Thor, and struck out with his leg. His foot impacted Thor in the back of the knee, and it made Thor go down to one knee in a stumbled moment. Once he was on the ground, Loki cast a binding spell to keep him there.

"There. Now maybe we can talk like sensible adults."

"REALSE ME NOW!" Thor screamed, and Loki felt the electricity in the air. Without Mjolnir in hand, Thor couldn't wield it as a weapon, but that didn't make it any less potentially dangerous.

"Traitor!" Thor all but yelled at him, and Loki's own anger flared.

For a moment, it burned so hot that he couldn't control it. Something shattered to his left, but he didn't care. His own power filled the air, and like the electricity, it wished to be lashed out. He barely managed to keep it under control, and had to fight to bring it back into it. He only managed it because maiming his king was punishable by death.

"You will not speak to me that way again," Loki hissed.

He was many things, many of them bad, but not that. He would not let his self righteous fool of a brother accuse him of that.

"Says the man who plotted to make himself king!" Thor retorted.

"I do not want to be king!" Loki screamed it, and he had never spoken a truer thing, "I've never wanted the throne!"

Thor didn't listen, only yelled once again, "Who else but you could have convinced Father to make me a puppet king!"

"I did nothing! I convinced Father of nothing!"

Even if he tried, it wouldn't have been for this. He would have tried to convince Odin that Thor wasn't ready, that he needed more time and more discipline. He never wanted this.

"Then why else would he!" There was a note of something else in Thor's voice, underneath the

anger. It was something uncertain.

"Because you're not ready!"

Thor's face changed. It was still furious, still wishing to do violence, but there was something else. It was the same face he wore when Frigga so prettily confirmed that Thor was a puppet. He was disappointed that someone else saw him as unworthy.

"Then you admit you would have me as your puppet!" There was the rage again, anything else buried underneath it.

It was one big circle, and it was frustrating. It made him want to scream. Why wouldn't Thor just listen?

"Then why aren't I there!" Loki retorted, "I left Thor! I left!"

Finally, finally, there was something that made Thor pause for a moment. A flash of hesitation went through his eyes, and Loki attacked it ruthlessly, "I am a poor puppeteer, if I think I can rule you from a different realm."

"You...you knew!" Thor seemed unsure now, but no less accusatory, "You knew Father's plan!"

"And I left! Father told me of his plans, and I left as soon as I had the chance@"

"Then why did you not tell me!" Thor shouted, "When Father came to you, why did you say nothing and run?"

"Because of this Thor! You came here, ready to beat me for the sins you think I've committed! You swung before you said a word! You attacked without even thinking to ask me what the truth was! Had I told you, this would have been no different!"

It wouldn't have been, because Thor would always assume that he was lying (granted, Thor wasn't completely wrong in that thinking). This would have played out the exact same...but here and now, Loki had Thor's idiotic mistakes to argue with. He didn't need to convince his brother he was wrong, only that he needed to change. Maybe now Thor would actually listen.

Thor was torn now, that much was obvious. He didn't know if he should ask Loki what he meant or to keep yelling at him, "I do not believe you!"

"How do you not see that I have no more desire to be Father's pawn than you do!"

"Pawn? How are you a pawn, when you would be king!"

"A shadow king, who would make you shine brighter than before. Meanwhile, in the shadows is where I'd be trapped, doing all but getting no glory. You would be loved and I would be forgotten, dismissed and reviled! I am sick of it Thor! I am sick of being your keeper, sick of giving up my own life for you! I will not do it, not anymore! I will not trap myself, not to this thankless task!"

Loki's spell had been slipping, had been unravelling the more his emotions got the better of him. Thor had been struggling against the bond the whole time. He felt the spell weakening, as Loki paced the room. When he felt it loosen just enough, he gave a mighty jerk and pushed through it. With a roar, he was on his feet again. Loki whirled to face him, but it was too late. Thor lunged at him, and pushed Loki to the wall, hand around his neck.

Stars exploded in Loki's eyes as he hit the wall, hard, plaster cracking beneath him. When his

vision cleared, he tried to kick out, but only managed to break another piece of furniture, not dislodge Thor. Thor's grip around his neck wasn't tight, wasn't cutting off air. It was only firm enough to hold him there, though that didn't make it any less infuriating.

"You lie!" Thor growled.

"For once," Loki replied with a sneer, "I do not."

They were at an impasse, the two of them. They just glared at each other viciously. Finally, Thor let go of his neck and took a step back. Loki rubbed his neck, and abruptly hit Thor with another spell. It was a small one that only sent Thor stumbling backwards and it was cast vindictively. It was done solely to punish Thor for grabbing him.

"You're angry at Father, angry at Mother, and what do you do? Come to take it out on me, the only other one caught up in this plan without their consent! You are a spoiled child Thor, to come here and lay the blame at my feet, when I've done all that I can to remove myself from it all! This is not my fault!" Loki screamed the last part like an angry child, but he felt justified in it. He was so sick of all of this!

"You won't believe me, because then you will have to think about it, and see why Father has done this! You will have to look at yourself, and for once see fault!"

"If you were better, then Father should have given it to you! I will not be your puppet!"

"I don't want you to be!" How many times did he have to yell this for Thor to understand? How many different ways did he have to say it, for Thor to finally get it? "I took myself away to stop it! O could not control you, could not play into Father's hands, if I was not there!"

"You must have done something!" Thor argued, "You did something from here, a spell of some sort, to thwart me-" he would have said more, but Loki cut him off.

"Oh no Thor. Any mistakes you've made, they are truly yours."

Finally, Thor stopped. He stopped fighting, stopped screaming and just looked at Loki. Loki stared back, unwilling to look away as his brother slowly absorbed the truth. Viciously, Loki wanted to see Thor's pain, to see him hurt. He wanted him to suffer for the things he had said in Asgard and for the things he had done here. Loki would twist the knife deeper and make his brother bleed, and would enjoy every minute of it.

"Putting that crown on your head was a mistake, thinking you could be so easily controlled was foolish. Father was right to want you reigned in, though this was the wrong way."

"Then you think he should have made you king," it was still accusatory.

Loki laughed, and the dark, bitter sound was a true one, "Are you man? I would be a terrible king! I am petty and vindictive, and I do not forgive slights. I would grow bored, and I would go too far to amuse myself, like I always do," there was more, and Loki grit his teeth and continued, because he had to make Thor listen, "I am not loved. The people of Asgard don't love me, and they never will. They fear me, but they will never respect me. They stand me well enough as their spare prince, but would hate me as king. As long as you're an option, they will only want you. I have just as much right to that throne as you, but the people will never suffer to see me on it. I'm a better politician, but you will always have the love of Asgard. I will never be equal to you in their eyes," it burned, and he had to swallow down the bitter shame of it, "so no Thor, I don't think Father should have made me king instead."

He felt like he had just laid himself bare for his brother's eyes, and Loki hated it. He didn't like being this exposed, especially not in front of Thor. The confession drained him more than the fight had, and he was tired of it. Loki was tired of it all.

Thor closed his eyes and stayed silent for a long time. Loki said nothing, only waited for his brother. Finally, Thor opened his eyes and turned his uncertain look on Loki. His voice was low when he spoke.

"I...I don't think he should have made me king either."

Loki was stunned into silence by Thor's declaration. For all his hopes, he had never once thought that Thor would have admitted that, let alone out loud. Thor filled Loki's silence with a rushed explanation.

"I have done nothing right! Every action I've taken, it has only gone wrong! The Dark Elves hate me! Our own lords hate me! I'm not good at this Loki! I don't know how to be terrible at something! I'm unworthy, and Father said it! He was right, and you should be king over me!"

Loki had cut him off, partly because if Thor questioned himself any more he might die of shock. The other part because, as angry as he was and how justified many of Thor's self criticisms were, the further down the path to uncurbed blame Thor went, the closer to hopelessness he'd come. A hopeless Thor wouldn't help the situation at all. It'd only make it worse.

"You are not unworthy, and Father is a fool," Loki spit it out, and he believed every angry word, "you're spoiled and arrogant, and that's more Father's fault than yours. Instead of raising you to be a true king, he raised you to be a puppet king. He let you continue to be an arrogant child, instead of shaping you into a king."

"Why?" Thor demanded, and it was obvious that, for all he addressed the question to Loki, it was Odin he wanted answers from, "Why would he plan this? Why would he want me to be such a terrible king, one so flawed I'd need you to take my place from the shadows?"

"You're not a terrible king Thor," Loki honestly believed that, otherwise he would have wiped his hands of this all and left, "you've made terrible mistakes, but that's not all of it. You're rash, unprepared one, but not the worst that the Realms have ever seen. You could be great, if you would just put aside your pride and allow yourself time to think before you act."

It didn't answer Thor's question, but it was beyond Loki. Only Odin could answer why he had decided on this idiotic course of action. Once Odin awoke from the Odinsleep, Loki would be right at Thor's side demanding those answers.

It was obvious that Thor couldn't completely believe him, that he still had doubts. That continuing doubt gave Loki hope. The first bit of praise hadn't gone straight to Thor's head, hadn't magically restored his arrogant self assurance. That was progress.

"I still don't understand," Thor said miserably.

If he were to be honest, Loki didn't either. He didn't think any of this made sense. Wouldn't it have been easier to plan Thor's kingship since they were children, to mould him into a king? To tell Loki when they were children that Thor would be king, and the second prince his advisor? It would have saved Loki years of hurt and frustration of trying to prove himself worthy of the throne of Asgard. He wouldn't have tried so damn hard to measure up to Thor and wouldn't have failed time and time again. He could have been happy. Odin failed them both.

"I'm sorry I blamed you," Thor said quietly, and once again Loki was shocked.

"You always do," Thor began to protest, but Loki gave him a look, "you do Thor. Don't go into denial now."

Thor just looked at him, and realized it was the truth. Whenever something didn't go his way, he blamed it on Loki if he could. Instead of accepting he had probably done something wrong, he brushed it off and called it all Loki's fault. How had he not noticed it before?

"Do...do you hate me?"

The question left Loki's mouth hanging open and eyes wide. It was a terrible question, one he never wanted Thor to have to ask. How far had Thor fallen, to even entertain the idea. Loki wanted Thor humbled, but never this low.

"No!" Loki's voice held the horror he felt at the question, "You're my brother! I love you Thor, more than anyone else! It is true that I do not like you much of the time, but I could never hate you!"

Loki was jealous of Thor, and resentful. He was usually angry or frustrated with him, and there were times he wanted to hurt him, to make him bleed. Yet for all that, he couldn't hate Thor, not truly.

"Then why did you run?" Thor was clearly relieved that Loki didn't hate him, but still concerned about everything else, "You said this would have happened if you told me of Father's plans, and perhaps it would have. But why did you leave altogether? Did you want me to completely make a fool of myself? Was this to punish me for always blaming you?"

Loki wanted to scream, because for all that Thor was asking about Loki, it was still all about Thor. He still was under the impression that everything Loki did, he did it in relation to Thor. Thor still hadn't realized that it wasn't all about Thor. Perhaps it was asking it a bit much for Thor to come that realization in such a small time.

"It's not about punishment," parts of it were, to be sure, but it wasn't his driving force, "it's about refusing to give up all the freedom I possess to be set on a path that I had no hand in choosing. It's not all about seeing you, Father or Asgard suffer. It's about finally being fed up with being second best, and refusing to resign myself to your shadow any longer. It's about me Thor, not you."

Thor stayed silent and just look at him for a long time. For the first time, it seemed to Loki that Thor looked and actually saw him. Finally, he spoke, "What would you have me do?" It was still about him, but at least he was asking what Loki wanted him to.

Loki couldn't help the small, sharp laugh, "Honestly? Saying 'thank you' on occasion would be a great start."

He didn't really want to tell Thor that, to open himself up that far. He didn't like showing weakness, hated showing it to the brother who had the ability to hurt him the most, mostly because he did it unthinkingly.

Thor stared, "You are my brother...of course I am thankful for you."

It really was that simple for Thor, but it was so simple for him that he couldn't understand why it was so complicated. He, who had always been the appreciated hero who everyone loved, couldn't understand what it was like to be dismissed, the pain it caused.

"I know you are, but being thankful is not the same as thanking someone Thor. Every time I do something that aids us, that saves us, you call it a trick and wave it away, be it magic or talking our

way out. You take away my accomplishments and then demean and dismiss them. I've saved your life Thor, and you've always told me you could have done it yourself. I've talked our way out of situations that could have led to all out war, and you've always told me that I should have just let them try and fight Asgard, if they had such a problem."

"It's glory you want?"

"I'd enjoy a little glory every now and again, but no. I'd settle for simple acknowledgement."

With every bit of himself Loki laid out, Thor looked even more bewildered, "Surely you know I jest, when I call your magic tricks."

"Once or twice is a jest Thor," Loki replied dryly, "every single time is an opinion."

"You're powerful!" Thor protested, "I know that!"

"Then why do you treat my magic like it's a game?" Loki countered, voice rising, "You speak of it like I'm a child. You say you know I'm powerful, yet you dismiss me every chance you get! Because of that, everyone else feels they have the right to do the same!"

"I only say these things because it is different-" Thor tried to defend himself, but Loki was not having it.

"You don't understand it," Loki snapped, "so you don't enjoy it, which in turn makes you consider it unimportant. You think it beneath your notice because it bores you, and don't acknowledge that other people may enjoy it. You don't understand that either, so you dismiss them -dismiss me- as unimportant. You do the same thing to politics and diplomacy, and that is why you're in trouble!"

He was breathing hard by the time he finished, and angrily stared Thor down, daring him to contradict or challenge him. Thor stayed silent, weighing Loki's words and actually thinking about his response for once.

"I do not think you're completely right about me," Thor replied, and a furious Loki began to reply, but Thor kept talking, "because I truly never meant to be hurtful. I think you give me too much malice," that was possible, because Loki often attributed malice to those who had none, "yet my opinion does not matter. If this is how you truly feel, then I am at fault no matter my intentions. I'm sorry Loki, for all that I've done."

Anger still stirred in Loki, but it was calming. Thor was honest, earnest in his response. Even though Thor still didn't understand how he had hurt Loki, he did understand that he had and acknowledged it. Considering how this meeting had started, it was an astounding change. A part of Loki wanted to press further, to argue until Thor understood the rest, but he didn't for now, because it was enough. It was more than he had ever expected, and he could try for more later.

"Thank you Thor," Loki truly meant it, and that was something else he never would have believed would happen.

The brothers stared at each other for a long time, until Thor finally sighed, "I understand why you left, why you have no desire to be involved in my reign."

"I have nothing against being your advisor Thor," that was true, "I've prepared for the role for years. I do not mind the role, but it won't be my entire existence. Father's plan made me decide that I won't do it on anyone's terms but my own."

Thor looked relieved, and Loki realized his brother had always expected him to be his advisor

when he was king. Thor liked that it would be his brother that was his council, and hated the possibility that Loki would reject the position. Loki was impressed that Thor had no plans to demand he do it, despite Loki's wishes.

"What are those terms?"

"I will not be hidden in the shadows, not anymore. It will be an official position, and everyone will know it's mine. You will say that you follow my advise, though you don't have to say every time you follow it. Although," Loki added as an afterthought, "I do expect to be toasted at the celebration feast if I do something particularly impressive."

"Those are terms I can meet," Thor said without pause, "though you may need to remind me of them on occasion. Does this mean you'll settle the current problems I've caused?"

"I'm not fixing this mess for you Thor," Thor looked betrayed, as though what they had just said meant nothing. Loki continued before Thor could protest, "that will solve nothing, and it will not change anything. I will however, lend my expertise to you, so we can solve this together."

1.1.1.1

"I still think they overreacted," Thor grumbled under his breath, and Loki rolled his eyes. It was a childish argument, and Loki wasn't even going to bother to comment on.

"Your best plan is to apologize without apologizing," Loki told him, looking up in time to see the confusion on his brother's face, "it's really not that hard, and a skill that you should learn. For example, apologize for your behaviour during the council meeting, but don't directly say you were wrong. Say that you were overwhelmed, that you were nervous. It was your first duty as king, and you felt more pressure than you expected. You overreacted, and in doing that, did not make yourself clear...and that is where you apologize without apologizing," he paused, and felt something warm bloom in him at the look -interest and a hint of fascination- on Thor's face, "apologize for being nervous, ask for forgiveness for not making yourself clear...but do not admit that you were wrong. Say nothing about being wrong, pretend you weren't wrong at all -and you actually were Thor, don't forget that-, but pretend the only mistake that you truly made was not being clear."

"So I admit that it was my fault," Thor finished, "without saying there was anything wrong with my point," Thor was grudging when he spoke, "that's clever."

It was not praise, which was disappointing, but it wasn't condemnation either. Even a few hours ago, Thor would have simultaneously told him it was dishonourable to use half life with proclaiming that he was completely in the right all along.

"I can do that," Thor replied, and then hesitated for a moment, "it would be best if I knew exactly what to say before I go in, wouldn't it?" the look Loki shot him was 'obviously', "Will...will you help?" It was obvious that Thor was still struggling with asking for help, even as he swallowed his pride. They were baby steps, and Loki still couldn't believe he was seeing it.

"I am the one with the silver tongue, and the last thing we need is you blundering through and causing a full on revolt of the countryside," Thor glared, and Loki just smirked right back at him, "you also need to focus on a few more personal insults, do you not?"

Thor looked surprised, then sheepish, "How-"

"We've been watching you since the day after we arrived in Alfheim," Loki admitted, "I saw the

whole thing."

Rage started brewing on Thor's face, and Loki realized he probably shouldn't have admitted to that. Knowing that Loki had left him to flounder was one thing, but doing that while watching Thor make a fool of himself was another, "You knew-

"And did nothing," a silky voice spoke from the doorway, "because otherwise, my dear, it would have defeated the point."

They both turned to see Amora breeze into the room, closing the door tightly behind her. She took a seat on the bed and looked at them expectantly, "Well? Continue."

Thor looked ready to argue, but Loki silenced him with a look, "Whatever you're going to say, it's probably better if you don't," Thor saw the truth of it, and didn't tell Amora to leave.

Loki didn't mind Amora being there, at least not at the moment. While he wouldn't discuss state secrets anywhere near her (there would come a time when it would be in Amora's best interest to use those secrets, and she would barely hesitate for a moment before doing just that), the way to soothe the bruised egos of some important people was hardly top secret. Amora would probably have some good ideas on top of what Loki and Thor could come up with.

"The easiest one to placate will be Eli," Loki spoke again, "he despises change, and you barrelled in saying you'd do what you want. He shouldn't have kept bringing up Father like that, because of course it was going to set you off. Father casts a large shadow, and constantly reminding you you're in it was a terrible idea. You'll apologize for your anger, but be firm in your message that you're king now, not Odin. Be sure to stress you will speak with Odin when considering changes, and will listen to the advice he gives."

Amora spoke from where she lounged on the bed, "You do plan to ask your father for advice, yes?"

"Yes!" Thor replied, looking affronted, and when Loki gave him a look, his affront abated some, "...I will now! I'm angry at him, but I cannot dismiss his successful rule."

"Good, because Father was a fair and just ruler," Loki said, "he is still well loved. We're both furious, but it's true. Assuring the populace that you will take Father's wisdom into consideration for your own ruling will instil a sense of continuity in them," Loki looked at Thor, "he's not always right. He makes mistakes, and sometimes he makes terrible choices. Just look at us, and what he's done. Father isn't perfect, but he did successfully rule Asgard for a millennia. Ask for his advice, but don't believe you have to take it, anymore than you feel you have to take mine. In the end, you're the king, and when you actually stop to think, you have an almost sickening habit of doing the right thing. You'll be a good king Thor."

The look on Thor's face, full of warmth, pride and love, made everything worth it. When Thor reached out and grasped his shoulder tightly, squeezing it, Loki couldn't help but smile -a true smile, not one of his grins or smirks- back.

"Thank you brother," Thor sounded almost choked up, but Loki refrained from commenting on the emotion.

"How sweet. Is this the part where you kiss?"

In that moment of brotherly affection, Loki had forgotten that Amora was even there. When he broke Thor's gaze he looked over at Amora, who was grinning and had mischief dancing in her

eyes.

"Amora my dear, that was one desire of yours that I did not need to know."

"Oh well," The Enchantress sighed dramatically, "a girl may dream," Thor looked disgusted, and even Loki had to suppress a shudder, "but tell me, I'm curious as to how you're going to soothe the poor, bruised ego of young Dagar."

"I will invite him next time we go on a quest," Thor replied easily enough, "...and I wouldn't do it as a jest this time. Surely, a chance to go on an adventure would make him happy?"

Loki considered it, thought all the ways it could go wrong and all the ways it could work in their favour. He nodded, "It is a good idea," Thor beamed at the approval, "but it can't be an actually dangerous quest, and for Hel's sake, no teasing or shaming the boy if he's not perfect! We need him, and more importantly his father, on your side if we want to be able to continue feeding the people in the cities.

"Those hurts are easy to heal," Loki continued, "I'm more concerned with Forsetti. It seems that slights to manhood are the ones taken with the utmost seriousness," Loki didn't particularly understand it. His manhood had been called into question more than once, and while he could admit that he was offended, and yes, rather hurt depending on who it came from, but he hardly considered it the worst insult that had been thrown at him.

"That's easy," Amora replied, "invite his wife to attend next year's council with him," both Odinsons turned and looked at her, and she rolled her eyes, "surely it's not that shocking of an idea?" There was a hint of disgust in her voice.

"How would that fix the slight I made to his manhood?" Thor sounded confused.

Amora sighed, appearing to barely suffer the stupidity of the question, "Have you truly not noticed the tendency of men to take pride in the accomplishments of their women as though it's their own? Compliment a woman's accomplishment, and her husband puffs up like a peacock. Whether or not they had any part of it, men seem to take glory from the glories of women. So tell Forsetti that you were trying to tell him that his wife was invited to attend next year's meeting, but worded your request poorly. It's clear he thinks highly of his wife, and you were so impressed with his talk, that you thought she'd be a fine addition to the meeting. You've been considering adding a woman for awhile, believe a woman could offer a different yet important perspective than a man," Amora paused, and looked at Thor with narrowed eyes, "you do believe that, yes?"

"Yes!" Thor assured her quickly, "How could I not, with Sif as a companion?"

"Then you're not opposed to women on your councils?" Thor shook his head, and Amora finished, "Good."

Loki wouldn't have thought of Amora's plan, but he agreed it was a good one. Then, he caught onto what Amora was saying, "Good gods, are you angling for a position on one of the councils?" That was an appropriately horrifying thought.

Amora grinned, all teeth and mystery, "Perhaps, or maybe I'm simply sick of people dismissing me because I happen to be a woman. Perhaps I'm simply hoping a new king will mean changes, ones that many of us will welcome."

In all his years, Loki had never seen Amora this serious. Despite the fact he more than agreed with her on the matter, he hadn't known it was a subject she felt so strongly about. Amora had always

flaunted the womanly expectations that Asgard held, the same as Sif had. They took very different paths and lived very different lives, but they did what they wanted and damn what others thought. As someone who had done the same, Loki respected both of them greatly for it. As far as Loki was concerned, he would welcome those changes as well.

Thor noticed how serious Amora was, and he replied to her equally as serious, "Aye, that is something I will do. Sif has already asked me, and I gave her my word that this is something I will do. I believe it right. I will, perhaps, be smarter about it than I would have been before."

For all Thor's faults, and all the times he perhaps acted as though he acted as though he believed Asgard's standards (mostly because he was usually incapable of thinking before speaking), he was never one to see women as below him. He heard a young Sif's declaration of her future as a warrior, and told her they would be the greatest warriors Asgard had ever seen together. He had never complained of Frigga's regency during the Odinsleep, even after he came of age and was technically old enough to make temporary king. He saw that the ambassador of the Dark Elves was a woman, and welcomed her as warmly as he would a man, treated her as an equal. As long as he considered them worthy enough, Thor would have no problem having a woman sit on a council.

"Doing it right will mean doing it slowly," Loki was planning now, "it will have to be gradual. Start slowly, by adding Alivia to the meeting next year. Frankly, most people will barely notice it and will care even less. Sif, of course, will be on your war council," that was a given, but Thor nodded anyway, "honestly, no one will complain about that, not with the way Sif has proven herself over the years. Sif deserves that position, and no one will dispute it. But between the two of them, they will start change. Get people used to it, and then make another small change and keep that pattern. Some will still complain, but ignore them, because you are king."

"I would have made a grand proclamation," Thor said sheepishly, "that would not have worked well, would it?"

It seemed that Thor was learning, "No, it would not."

For the first time, Loki understood why he had always known Thor would eventually make a great king.

"What about the Dark Elves?" Thor asked, "The strife I caused with them is far greater than that which I caused in Asgard."

Loki bit back a groan. He had willed that particular disaster out of his mind. If he had continued to think about it, it would only have given him a headache. He felt one coming now.

"You will go to Svartalfheim as soon as possible, and you will admit without pause that you were drunk and stupid. First, you will beg for Gersemi's forgiveness, then you will ask Malekith's pardon. Humbling yourself is the only thing that will even begin to appease the Dark Elves. Then, you will offer to bring every treaty we have with them to the table, and you will be more than generous when renegotiating the terms. We do not want war with them."

"Could we win?" Thor's question alarmed Loki.

"Yes, but not without heavy losses to us. We'd be weak at the end, and there are other realms who would take advantage of that weakness."

Thor was silent for a last time, and Loki held his breath. Surely Thor wasn't actually considering starting a costly and pointless war now? Finally, Thor said, "Then I will see the Dark Elves appeased."

Loki breathed a sigh of relief, but he noticed the look on Thor's face -cloudy- and said nothing. Instead, he waited for his brother to speak.

"The greatest stories told of Father, and his father before him, are those of his bravery and greatness. When people recall his strength, they speak of the wars against the Vanir and the Jotun. Father proved himself a great king on the battlefield. Is it truly so wrong for me to what to do the same?"

Loki knew Odin had accused Thor of being a child more concerned with glory than anything else. He also knew Thor had replied to Odin's accusations with anger, but it appeared the message had stayed with him. It was clear he had been using it to re-evaluate himself. It had shaken Thor down to his core, and Loki pitied him, even as he was grateful that Thor was finally becoming the man Loki always knew he could be.

"To want to prove yourself a warrior king? No, because what king doesn't want that? You're a warrior Thor, and you have battle lust. But to cause war, to lead your subjects to their deaths, all in an effort to claim glory for yourself? Yes Thor, that is wrong. Courting war in order to make yourself look good is never good."

"I know that!" Thor protested, "I am not completely without sense. I just..."

"Would have acted without thinking, done something incredibly stupid and then realized only after the blood bath was over that it was not your best idea. Then you would have brooded, done something terribly heroic to make yourself feel better, and then the cycle would repeat a suitable amount of time later."

That was...completely accurate. Amora's summation was a very good one. Thor looked rather abashed, and Loki was impressed. Perhaps Amora's presence on a few councils would be a good thing after all.

"Ah..." Thor shuffled, looking like an overly large child who had been caught out in his wrong doing, "but...but it will be different now!"

Loki raised an eyebrow, amazed that Thor was under the impression that everything was fixed. This was step one in a long journey. There would be stumbles and missteps on both their parts. There would be anger and miscommunications, and chances were that there would be other meetings like this, trying to fix mistakes one of them managed to make. It was not perfect, but that they could come to this now was a good sign...but first, they needed to fix the current problems. First things first after all.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully it all lived up to expectations!

Chapter Eight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The feasts of Alfheim weren't nearly as uproarious as those of Asgard, and it was one of the reasons Loki preferred them. The second reason was that it was preferred them. The second reason was it was possible for his own name to be raised up and praised, something that never happened in Asgard.

He was the hero of the tale, for saving the lives of one of the princes. Gunnar told the story with great relish, especially the part where he had withstood fire burning out poison without passing out. He didn't shy away from the fact that he had needed to be saved, and thanked Loki wholeheartedly.

Loki was the best with illusions, so when the youngest princes - no more than children- begged him to show them the fight, he obliged. The hall cheered for them as they watched, including the Asgardians who sat at places of honour beside him.

"Good show!" Fandral said jollily, slapping him on the back (which Loki could have done without).

"My daughter will love this!" Volstagg was excited, "especially if you present her with a claw as well!"

Amora, also seated with them, sent him an outraged look. Loki shrugged apologetically and then let her fume. Nothing, not even Amora's fairly justified anger, was going to take away his good mood.

Even Sif complimented him, "Well done."

Loki idly wondered if, now that he and Thor had spoken, if it would be like this at feasts back in Asgard. Oh, he doubted any attention he'd get would be this enthusiastic, but it would be nice to just get some. He was sure Thor would let him have some now, though it might take some prodding to remind Thor of his promise.

Then there was dancing, where Loki was the preferred partner of the evening, of men and women both. He saved most of his dances for Amora, once she had gotten over her anger for him giving a chimera part away. She was, after all, her partner in crime throughout all this.

"I couldn't have done this without you," he told her softly, twirling her around.

"No, you couldn't, and I expect a reward for all my effort and hard work," she studied him, and slowly smiled, "I like it Loki. Happiness is a wonderful look on you."

Loki spent the night laughing.

1.1.1.1

There wasn't a crowd waiting them when the bifrost brought the five of them to Asgard. Loki wasn't expecting one. though he was surprised when Thor wasn't there.

"Greetings Brother," Sif was the first to greet the gatekeeper, the only one who was there with

them.

"Greetings," Heimdall replied, "Odinson, the king would see you immediately."

Worry blossomed in Loki's chest, "Nothing serious, I hope," it had only been three days, surely Thor couldn't have done something too drastic, not after all the plans they made. Granted, it could have happened, but Loki hoped it hadn't.

"No," it was all the gatekeeper said in return, and it irritated Loki.

"Well then," Loki replied with fake pleasantness, "I'd hate to keep my brother waiting."

The return to the palace was a quick one, and when they reached it, the warriors and Loki went their separate ways (Amora had stayed in Alfheim to finish a few things). It was a genuinely friendly farewell, and Loki promised to see them all later.

Loki was in a good mood, and he really hoped Thor hadn't done something to ruin it.

Loki found Thor in his office. He was sitting at his desk, a stack of documents in front of him and a bit of a lost look on his face. Loki leaned against the doorframe and looked on in amusement.

"Would you like some help?"

Thor looked up in relief. and didn't even hesitate when he said, "Yes!"

Loki chuckled and went to rescue his brother, "What are you looking at?"

"You told me that I would need to agree to re-work the treaties with the Dark Elves. I thought I should know what those treaties are."

Given how Thor hadn't even bothered finding out who the Dark Elf ambassador was, Loki was impressed at the initiative, "Yes, that is a good idea. What part has you confused?"

"I've gone through the peace treaties, and I understand a good deal of them. Minor scrimmages or attacks on either side aren't acts of war unless they can be traced back to the king or queen. That makes sense, when there's such bad blood between our people. That way, every little sign of hostility isn't something to declare war over. What I don't understand is the trade issues in the treaties," Thor held up the paper he was holding, and Loki took it.

He read over it quickly, "After our grandfather beat the Dark Elves in war, he forced them to break off any relations, especially trade, but diplomatic as well, realms hostile to Asgard. It was meant to stop the Dark Elves from gaining allies and threatening Asgard further. It was only Nornheim at the time of the treaty, but it was open ended, and came to include Vanahiem and Jotunheim as well."

"That's what I don't understand. Why are they still barred from trading with Vanahiem? The Vanir stopped being hostile to Asgard long before you and I were born."

"It was in Asgard's best interest to keep the two far away from each other. It gives Asgard the advantage, because those two powerful realms can only deal with each other through us."

Thor paused, "I can see why the Dark Elves don't want that. If we were to re-negotiate it, what would happen?"

Loki thought it over, "I do not think any harm would come from letting free trade run between

Svartalfheim and Vanahiem. The Vanir are our staunchest allies now. It would go far, I think, to improve the Dark Elves' current opinion of us. It would be the best gesture of good will we can make at first."

"What about Nornheim and Jotunheim?"

"Nornheim has withdrawn from the realms, and doesn't trade with anyone, so we can lift that restriction and nothing will happen. As for Jotunheim...Father cut them off completely. We'd have to negotiate with the Frost Giants before we can promise anything to the Dark Elves."

Thor gave him a distasteful look, "Should we?"

"Should we what?"

"Negotiate with the Frost Giants," it was obvious that Thor didn't want to do that.

Loki remembered the Jotun sorceress, the one he wanted to meet. There were so many possibilities there, ones that Loki wanted, even if Thor hated the idea, "Let's sort out the Dark Elves first, before we try anything else."

Thor nodded, and then brightened, "Very well. We shall continue this tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"We have a feast to attend!" Thor smiled at him cheekily, and then continued, "It seems that the first harvest of the season has made it to the city's granaries. I thought it reason enough to celebrate."

Loki was pleasantly surprised, "You settled with the lords?"

"I did!" Thor beamed proudly, "I made peace with them all!"

"I told you you'd be a good king Thor, if you only stopped to think."

"Yes, now come celebrate with me!"

l.l.l.l.l

It wasn't that long into the feast when Thor rose to his feet. Loki raised his eyebrows in question, but Thor just grinned at him. One by one, as the people realized that their king was waiting to address them, they fell silent. Once the silence was complete, Thor spoke in a booming voice.

"It has only been a few weeks, and already my reign has shown me many things. One of those things is that no man can do everything on his own, even if that man is a king. I've learned that a king is only as good as his advisors. I've learned this lesson the hard way, so the only thing for me to do is to name the chief advisor to the king. For me, there is only one choice.

"Long has he stood in my shadow, been my voice of reason and caution," Thor paused, letting humour enter his voice, "and it has been a thankless job, more often than not," there were a few chuckles from the crowd. When they quieted, Thor continued, serious once again, "I have learned, in the last few weeks, that shadows are a terrible place to be. I've also learned that, for all that it is his rule, a king cannot believe himself perfect. No matter how great a king he may be, it is still possible for a man to be blind to things that others may see. To not ask for council, to not heed good council, is not being a strong king...it is opening yourself -your kingdom- up to weakness.

"I know that I will need advice, but I don't wish it from the shadows. A prince may ignore council and claim all the glory for himself, but as a king, I will not. I will not pretend to have the wisdom to rule on my own, when it is my voice of reason who helps make me wise. That voice of reason has always been Loki, my beloved brother and dearest friend. I may be king, but his place will always be at my side. So I appoint him royal vizier. His strengths will make up for any weaknesses I may have, and with his good sense helping me, I will rule Asgard as justly and successfully as my father before me."

The cheering at the announcement was loud, though not quite thunderous. Those who sat at the high table cheered the loudest, and congratulated Loki on the appointment. Loki didn't completely hear it, because he was too busy gaping at his brother in shock.

He had told Thor he wanted an official title, but he hadn't expected this. Loki hadn't expected a speech in front of so many people. Abruptly, Loki realized that this feast wasn't to celebrate peace with the country lords, but to honour him. Tears stung the back of his eyes, but he held them back fiercely. He shouldn't be too surprised, not really. Thor always was one for grand gestures.

"You're speechless!" Thor was as gleeful as a child as he sat back down, "I've left the great Silvertongue speechless!"

"Who helped you come up with that?" Loki finally managed to ask. The speech was perfect, which told him that someone came up with the words, even if the sentiment was all Thor's.

"Why do you think I needed someone to help me?" Thor acted offended, but sighed at the look Loki gave him, "Fine. Mother helped," Thor leaned down so only Loki could hear him, "I spoke to her, and told her exactly how we felt. She was upset, yet glad we've reached an understanding. She wishes to speak with you."

Loki didn't like upsetting Frigga, and felt guilty for doing it, no matter how she may have deserved it. Regardless, she would have to wait, "Later," he replied, "for now, I wish to bask in my glory. Thank you Thor."

"You deserve it Loki," was his brother's reply, "and I should have known that sooner," Loki made a sound of agreement, and Thor laughed, "to Asgard," he lifted his glass.

Loki bumped his own against it, "To Asgard."

Chapter End Notes

Here we have it! The end! I just want to thank everyone who's read this story, left me reviews and encouraged me (even when I took obscene amounts of time to get chapters out). You're all awesome!

There will be a sequel, I promise you that, though I'm not sure when I'll get it out (I'm moving to another continent this weekend!). That said, it'll be here eventually, and I hope to see you there.

Peace, Love & Rainbows,
Niori

End Notes

So, the Amora I'm using is based off Tales of Asgard and what I've seen in countless fics, since I don't know comics Amora as well as I wish I did.

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